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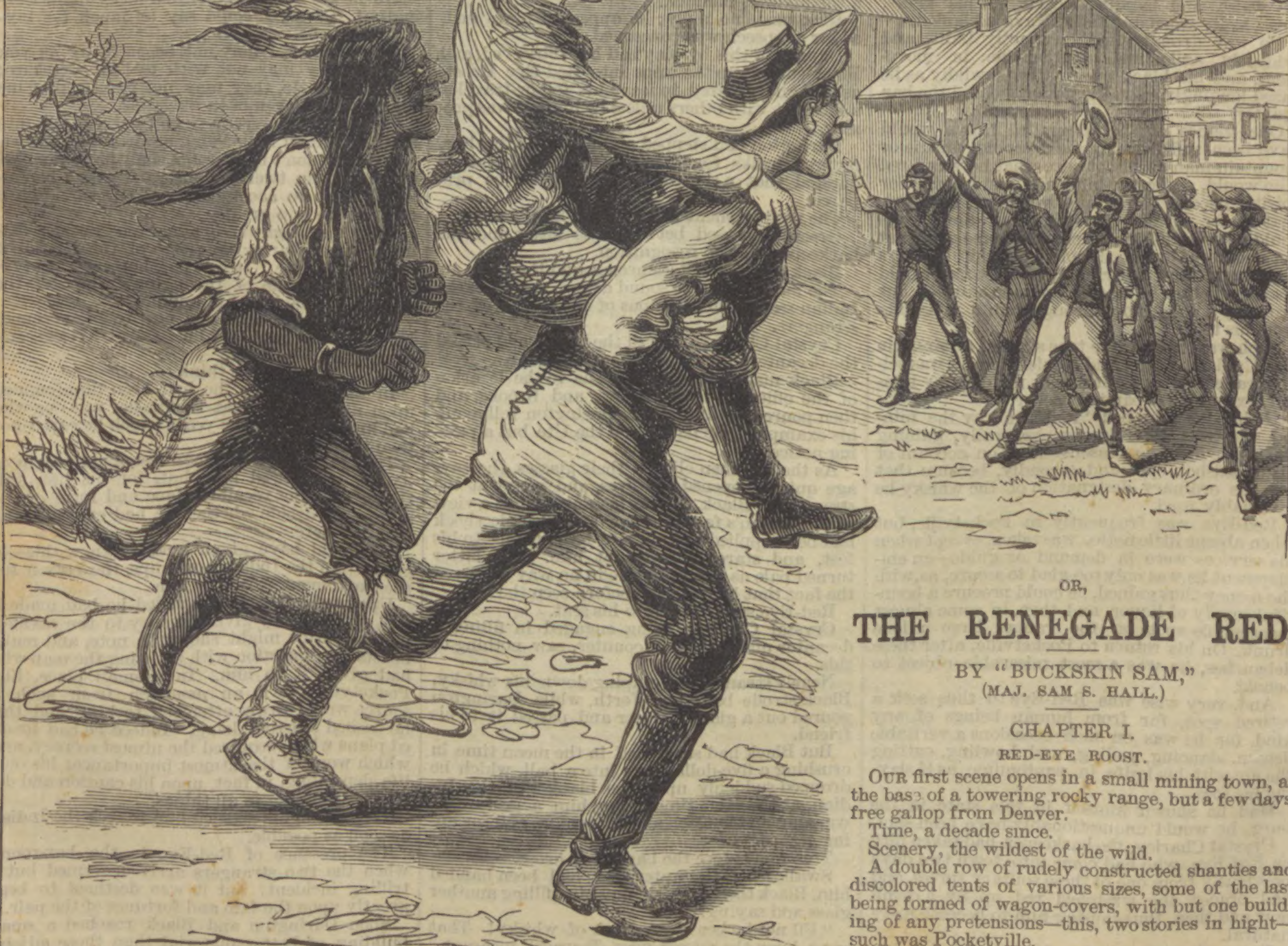
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THE DAISY FROM DENVER



OR,

THE RENEGADE RED.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM,"
(MAJ. SAM S. HALL.)

CHAPTER I.

RED-EYE ROOST.

OUR first scene opens in a small mining town, at the base of a towering rocky range, but a few days' free gallop from Denver.

Time, a decade since.

Scenery, the wildest of the wild.

A double row of rudely constructed shanties and discolored tents of various sizes, some of the last being formed of wagon-covers, with but one building of any pretensions—this, two stories in height—such was Pocketville.

On a rude sign over the door of this last mentioned establishment was painted, in large letters, "Red-Eye Roost"—which words were evidently intended to convey the intelligence, that liquors and

"HURRAH FER CACHE CARL O' CHICO! HURRAH FER RED-EYE! HURRAH FER
THER DAISY FROM DENVER!"

lodgings were the principal accommodations within the hostelry. In reality, it was a restaurant, dance-hall, gaming room and bar combined, with lodgings on the second floor.

The up and down range stage made halt at the "Roost," there being stables in the rear, and there changed horses. One night in this hotel, however, would prove to a guest that it was useless to go to "roost" until the small hours of the morning, as there was an unceasing racket below through the entire night, and the building shook and trembled when dancing was in progress, while the heavy-booted miners caused little less tumult at other times.

The whole lower story formed one large room, the bar being to the right in front as one entered, and a screen being before the door inside. The gaming-tables were in the rear, and also a lunch counter.

But, at the time of which we are now to speak, Red-Eye Roost was quiet, the miners being at work. Of course there was the usual number of "range bummers," who had nothing to do but loaf, smoke, and watch their chances for a drink at the expense of some "tender-foot," who might be soft enough to believe he could gain the worth of it in amusement or information.

The barkeeper of this delectable resort was an imported "Bowery Boy," with dark complexion, eyes, hair, and mustache, his general air and manner proclaiming him what he was.

On a long board bench, opposite the bar, there were, on this particular afternoon, three or four unfortunates outstretched; while, at the far end of the same, sat, stiff and rigid, a ragged and dirty Indian—a vagabond red-man, whose probable chief aim in life was to gain in any manner sufficient of the "fire-water" of the pale-faces to cause him to feel like a proud chief, and forget the fact that he had become a wandering and degraded refugee within his own race's hunting-grounds.

This Indian wore a tattered red shirt, ragged buckskin breeches, and a dilapidated pair of miner's boots, while upon his head was a battered plug hat, through the top of which were thrust several broken feathers. Wound about his waist, and hanging nearly to his knees, was a sadly worn and faded Navajo blanket.

He was strongly and compactly built, and evidently agile and panther-like in movement, and his black eyes glittered wildly as he gazed longingly upon the liquors behind the bar counter.

One glance at that degraded brave would have been sufficient to make an old prairie or mountain man decide at once that he was a red who would, under the influence and longing for spirits, become fierce and vengeful; and yet, that under certain circumstances, the savage could be trusted—that there was some good, not yet smothered by the vile poison his white brothers had taught him to drink. An old-timer would also decide that he was no common warrior, but probably a chief, now through rum a renegade from his tribe.

Such was, indeed, the true state of affairs. He was Ugalala, a Ute, and a chief; but he was seldom called by his right name; not even by himself, except when partially sober.

He had been dubbed "Red-Eye" by the miners, and was thus known generally, gaining this name for two reasons—first, on account of his bloodshot eyes, and secondly, because that was the ordinary designation of the whisky he invariably used.

Red-Eye was frequently in Pocketville, but when absent little notice was taken, except when his services were in demand as guide—an employment he was only too glad to secure, as, with the money thus gained, he could procure a bountiful supply of liquor, and then, in some almost inaccessible spot on the range, have a lone drunk. On his return to Pocketville, after these debauches, he was a most miserable object to behold.

And, very wise was Red-Eye to thus seek a retired spot, far from human beings of any kind, for he was on such occasions a veritable demon, dancing, yelling, and howling, cutting the air with his knife, in pantomime, as if slaying his foes.

Had he shown himself in this state in the burg, he would unquestionably have been shot.

Crystal Charley, the barkeeper, had taken pity on Red-Eye, who had come into town two days previously from one of these solitary sprees, and had braced the wretched red up by a drink now and then, thus causing him to become more natural.

It was about two in the afternoon of the day on which we thus picture Pocketville, that two horsemen rode into the town, their appear-

ance, and that of their steeds, proving that they had ridden the entire day, and were almost worn out.

There was a marked difference in these two men, in appearance and character.

One was short in stature, somewhat fleshy, of a florid complexion, with blue eyes and sandy hair. He appeared to be some fifty years of age.

His companion had passed about the same number of summers and winters, but here all resemblance ceased. He was tall, thin, and angular, his long black hair sprinkled with gray, and his eyes snaky and treacherous in expression.

When addressed by his comrade, he assumed a fawning and flattering manner, changing as much as possible the character so plainly written on his face.

The name of this swarthy individual was appropriate enough—William Black.

That of his fair and mild-spoken friend did not seem to fit him in any way, as it was impossible to associate anything in the "daring" line with him. It was David Darington.

He appeared to be the perfect personification of meek and childlike inoffensiveness.

The riders drew rein opposite Red-Eye Roost, and dismounted, giving strong evidence of stiffness and fatigue, indicating that they were not accustomed to the saddle.

Crystal Charley gave a yell, which had the effect of summoning a lazy-looking and grumbling hostler, who took charge of the animals. He, however, quickly threw off his churlishness, and became obsequious and lively, as Black placed a silver dollar in his hand, without being seen by Darington, who was then ascending the steps to the hotel. This act, together with the expression of Black's face as he gazed into the hostler's eyes, and spoke a few low words, would have at once aroused suspicions as to his kindly feelings for the man with whom he was traveling.

"Hu-s-sh! Mum's the word. You don't know me, Dick. How the deuce do you come to be here? I may want to use you; but, if you breathe a word, I'll blow you out of your boots!"

The last words were uttered, almost hissed, in a threatening manner.

Dick made no reply; he appeared paralyzed, as far as speech was concerned.

Naught of this by-play had been observed, and Black sprang up the steps into Red-Eye Roost, as though he feared to leave his fellow-traveler a moment with others unless he himself was present.

Darington had stepped at once up to the bar, ordered drinks for himself and friend, and requested that a lunch should at once be prepared.

The next moment Black joined him.

Greetings passed between the latter and the barkeeper, but no recognition.

Black cast a quick glance around the room.

The bummers were sound asleep, and even the Indian seemed unconscious of the arrival of the strangers.

Crystal Charley ordered the lunch, and passed the decanter and glasses out upon the bar.

Black made some inquiries as to the location of the office of one Saunders and Brooks, and then poured out his liquor, Darington following his example. He had given the Ute but a passing notice.

As the two men clicked their glasses, the savage quickly opened his eyes, and gazed at the strangers. Black, at that instant, caught a view of the Indian's face, and, as if an electric shock had been applied to him, Red-Eye sprang to his feet, and stared directly at him. The latter turned pale as death, but he in no way betrayed the fact that he had ever before seen the red.

Red-Eye sunk back into his seat.

Crystal Charley, being engaged in filling a decanter under the bar counter, saw nothing of this.

Nearly strangled in gulping down his whisky, Black strode back and forth, while Darington poured out a glass of water and passed it to his friend.

But Black had succeeded in the mean time in crushing a five-dollar note into a ball, which he dropped suddenly upon the blanket of the Indian, at the same time giving him a gesture of warning and caution and a piercing and meaningful glance.

This was before the barkeeper arose.

Swallowing the water that had been handed him, Black thanked his companion, filling another glass and saying:

"I'll not be beat by a drink of whisky! That went down the wrong way. It wasn't pleasant."

"I should say not," was Darington's reply. "I thought you would go into a fit. It seemed

to break you all up. You must have been thinking of something else besides your liquor."

This was but too true, and Black could scarcely suppress his natural scowl and growl, but Darington was unconscious that anything was amiss with his fellow-traveler.

"Come," said the latter, at length, "we'll trot around to the office and let Brooks know we have arrived. By that time our lunch will be ready. My friend"—this to the barkeeper—"give that Indian and those gents a couple of rounds of drinks at my expense. I owe them that much for disturbing their snooze."

"All right, sir," returned Crystal Charley.

"Boys, glide up, and brace up."

"Hurra-a fer ther stranger!"

"He's a high-fly, jam-up pilgrim."

"Jist 'roved, he did, in time ter save we-uns from jist sp'illin'. 'Rah fer him! I kin chamber 'bout four fingers this trip, Charley."

"If you can get it, my cove. One drink that size counts for two rounds, remember that."

Thus explained Crystal Charley.

The bummers, who had been awakened by the noise made by Black, cried out as recorded when the two strangers had passed into the street. They then sprang eagerly up to the bar, with the most intense satisfaction as well as longing, imprinted upon their faces.

The Indian also stepped up to take his favorite beverage, the five-dollar greenback tightly clutched, but he looked not in the direction of the entrance, nor toward any one. His stoical face gave no sign of the thoughts that were then ruling his brain.

CHAPTER II.

SUSPICIONS HAUNT THE GUILTY MIND.

THE two men, Black and Darington, walked down the street, side by side.

"Black," said the latter, at length, "I am not sorry we have reached the end of our journey. The saddle does not agree with me."

"Me, too," was the reply. "But this is a rough camp. The whole town, with all the real estate in view, does not appear to be worth one-tenth of what you have been offered for your share in the mine. You are a lucky man, Darington! I wish I could say as much for myself."

"As to that, I may not be as lucky as you think. They may not wish to buy my share; and, if they do, they may not care to give me the amount spoken of in the letter."

"It is just one year since I put \$25,000 into the Flush Hand Mine; and, according to the letter, if they don't back out, I shall have doubled my money in twelve months. I wish I had allowed Dash to accompany us. He would have enjoyed the trip greatly."

Black's eyes glittered avariciously and gloatingly, when Darington spoke of the \$50,000 he hoped to receive. It was not, however, the proceeds of the sale of Darington's share of the mine, that Black had in mind.

He paid little attention now to his surroundings, and was glad that his fellow-traveler seemed interested in them.

Black had much to think of.

In the first place, he had been dumfounded upon discovering that the hostler was one who had known him in the years which he cared not then to remember.

Then the Indian had manifested plain signs of having recognized him; but, for his life, Bill Black could not recall the face and form of the savage, or decide whether he had ever met the red, or where.

He would have given much to know this—to gain, from the Indian's own lips, the reason for the excitement shown by him.

Upon reflection, he concluded he had made a fool of himself by giving money to the savage; for the latter might show the note, and make boasts in connection with knowing the man who had given it to him. In a small place, like Pocketville, such an assertion from such a source would draw attention to him; and this he wished to avoid doing. Indeed he had formed plans which required the utmost secrecy, and which were of the utmost importance; his own life depending, in fact, upon his caution and deliberate cunning in all things.

These thoughts decided him to seek the Indian as soon as possible.

The presence of Red-Eye in the bar-room, when the two strangers arrived, seemed but a trifling incident; but it was destined to bear greatly upon the fate and fortunes of the pair.

Soon Darington and Black reached a small building, of better material than those adjoining it; the same being clapboarded.

A small sign was over the door.

Upon this was lettered the following:

"OFFICE.

"FLUSH-HAND MINE."

"Here we are," said Black.

"Yes; and I hope they got my letter, and are in town."

Darlington mopped his perspiring face as he thus spoke.

The two men advanced to the door, and the latter tapped slightly upon it.

"Come in!"

This came from the cabin, uttered in a gruff voice.

They entered, Black keeping purposely in the rear.

There were two occupants of the room.

Black made rapid gestures, which both saw, though they pretended not to notice him.

Their attention was all directed toward Darlington, who was welcomed with cordiality.

The men in the office were roughly attired, and had a decidedly dissipated appearance.

"Glad to find you at home, gentlemen," said Darlington. "I presume you received my letter."

"Yes," returned Brooks; "and, by your presence on time you find us here. Had you not arrived until to-morrow, we should have been down the range on business."

"I'm glad our trip was not made for nothing, then," rejoined Darlington, as he seated himself. "The journey has been a fatiguing one. We merely called now, however, for a few moments, for we are in need of refreshments."

"I wish just to know if you two are of the same mind as when you wrote me. Business is business, and I am desirous of starting back to Denver, day after to-morrow."

Black had remained standing, and in such a position as to prevent Darlington from observing him.

A nod of his head, and a rapid exchange of glances between him and Saunders and Brooks, the two partners of Darlington in the mine, evidently guided the pair in their decision.

"We agree to the terms," said Saunders. "How's that, Brooks?"

"I'm satisfied," was the response. "We'll take a drink all around on it. To-morrow settles the thing. It's a big sum to pay out, situated as we are, but I'm not kicking."

"If you prefer it, Darlington, we'll sell out to you at the same rate. Pay us \$100,000, and you can have the Flush Hand. That's the way the matter stands all around."

"Just so, pard," agreed Saunders.

Black remained standing. He was still silent, but his face betrayed his anxiety.

An observer would have decided that he was more interested than any one present in regard to the sale of the mine.

Such was, indeed, the case.

"I've got enough on my hands now," said Darlington. "I want to have more leisure and freedom from business cares. Besides, it is impossible for me to give any attention to the mine, therefore I accept the offer."

"We will make the proper legal arrangements to-morrow."

"All right," said Saunders, "let's irrigate."

Each took a glass of liquor without further ceremony. Black and Darlington then left the office, to return to the hotel.

Suddenly the latter slacked his walk.

With a disturbed countenance, he addressed his companion:

"What will Brooks and Saunders say when they find out that I've purchased a one-third interest in the mines up-range?"

"It goes against my grain to deceive any one, and I felt ashamed when I told them I could not attend to so much business. But you instructed me to put it in that way."

"Don't let that worry you," said the other, with a light laugh. "I believe they are but too glad to buy you out. That mine is paying better than they have represented, depend upon it."

"I hope you will get the fifty thousand all right; but it will be dangerous to reveal the fact that you have sold out, for there is always a reckless crowd in these mining towns, and we would stand a chance of being 'pulled up' before getting far from the burg."

"I am aware of all that, and therefore do not understand why you have advised me to keep the money with us a part of the way back, before expressing it."

"Because, as I told you, it would not be safe to express it in Placertown. It is the most lawless burg on the range. We are both armed, and, I reckon, can protect ourselves."

"Why, man, I know nothing of the use of

firearms! I should be almost helpless. I wish Dash was with us."

"What could he do?"

"Few can beat him, let me tell you, with any kind of weapons. I miss him ever so much—more now than I ever have done."

"You'll feel better when we have had something to eat. Here we are at Red-Eye Roost. What a queer name, by the way!"

"Yes; and a queer lot of people. I'll own I'm hungry, but I feel quite sleepy also."

An exultant look flashed from Black's eyes at these words.

They both entered the hotel.

"Lunch ready, gents!" announced Crystal Charley.

Black glanced around the room.

The Indian was not to be seen.

He began to look furious.

Was he to be baffled by a red-skin?

He had not the slightest recollection of ever having met the Indian, yet he knew the evident surprise of the stoical savage had some meaning.

His past was a dark and crime-stained one, and he feared that the red knew too much of him, and would perhaps say something to others which might be the means of ruining the one grand plan of his life—a scheme which was to place him high up in riches and station.

However, he showed nothing of his fears and suspicions, but went on eating his lunch, noticing with pleasure that Darlington showed stronger evidence of being fatigued and sleepy. This proved that his accomplices had understood his gestures, and had drugged Darlington's liquor.

Leaving the table they went up to their rooms which adjoined each other.

Black then complained of feeling sleepy, as well as his companion.

Each passed into his own room, and Black soon had the satisfaction of hearing his fellow-traveler breathing heavily, as if in a deep sleep. He then descended to the lower floor and to the bar.

"My pard is not used to travel," he remarked, "and has retired. Do not have him disturbed. He will probably sleep until morning."

"If he can slumber through the rush and row to-night," said Crystal Charley, "he'll be more than sleepy. This is a lively old hurrah of a hole when biz once starts in good solid earnest."

This information worried Black somewhat, and he resolved that he would work lively himself.

The Indian was still conspicuous by his absence.

Black ordered drinks for all in the bar, and then, with hurried steps, returned to the office of the Flush Hand Mine.

When he entered, and the occupants of the cabin saw that he was alone, they both came forward, eagerly exclaiming, in chorus:

"Whar's ther ole coon? Did ther drink level him?"

"Yes; you worked it all right. He's asleep now, and we'll run the racket through. I may be forced to change plans somewhat, but I'll keep you posted."

"Now, I want to know who the Old Boy that Indian is, I saw at the hotel?"

"Red-Eye, I reckon," answered Saunders.

"Does he hang out here in the burg?"

"Sometimes he's hyer, and at others in the rocks up-range, drunk mostly. Why?"

"Because he knows me, sure as shootin'; and I'm bound to find out what he knows of me before he spills our gravy. I chucked him a bribe, but he may tumble to my racket, and blow to the old gent. Where'll I find him?"

"Ain't he at the big ranch?"

"No. He levanted while we were here—Darlington and myself."

"That's strange; for he's just a day or two off a big spree now."

"Oh! I'll find him, you better believe. This is a big game, and I don't want to risk chances on a misdeal."

"I'm going to look that red up. Both of you remain here, and stay for good until I come to see you."

"O. K."

"All right!"

Bill Black passed quickly out from the office, having all at once thought of another whom he had come upon, who had known him—the hostler—and not being without suspicions that the Indian and Dick might be found together.

He did not feel like trusting either of them for a moment.

He was half-way from the office to the hotel, when his keen and suspicious gaze detected something at a distance, upon the mountain-side and entering a gorge.

It was the renegade red—none other than the savage he sought, beyond a doubt.

In long strides Black entered amid the boulders, cedars, and pines, leaving the town behind him.

He was bent upon following Red-Eye, although he had not good and sufficient reasons for giving himself so much trouble.

If the Indian was leaving the burg, what harm could he do?

Thus, indeed, Black reasoned, yet, from some irresistible impulse that affected him strangely and unaccountably, he climbed on after the retreating red-skin.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS.

WILLIAM BLACK stole rapidly up the side of the range, taking care that he was not observed from below. On he went, along the rocky bed of a huge gorge, his eyes fixed ahead, but he gained no sight of his game.

More than once he halted, hesitating as to whether he should proceed further; the hesitation ending in another advance. Into the very heart of the mountains he seemed to have penetrated, when suddenly he gave an ejaculation of mingled surprise and exultation; for he caught a flitting glimpse of the Indian, as the latter turned from the main break into a branching rent of small dimensions.

Had the pursuer been a moment later, or had he for a moment permitted his gaze to wander, he would have lost all chance of finding the renegade brave.

For some distance he now proceeded, the way becoming darker and still darker; he being forced to advance slowly, and with greater caution. By this time he had worked himself up into a great rage, for he knew he ought instead to be in Pocketville, perfecting his villainous plans. Yet still, some unaccountable impulse urged him on.

Soon he caught sight of firelight in the distance, and knew he was near his destination.

Serpent-like, he worked his way up to this point. It was a rude hut, rudely constructed.

Black listened intently, and heard low voices within. They were quite distinct.

"Why did you not bring me some tobacco and whisky, Ugalala?"

These words were spoken by a white man.

"Red-Eye he bad in head. No think. Spirits of fathers whisper in ears. Ugalala bring whisky, bring tobacco, when sun go to sleep. It is good."

"You need not go back to-night. Sleep here. I can do very well without them for one night."

"My white brother no like people of his tribe?"

"No! I hate and despise them all! I lived alone by myself many moons before I knew you, Ugalala. I am what my people call a hermit. This has been my home for years."

"I was rich once, but was robbed by one whom I trusted—robbed of all my fortune and left for dead. But I still live, and if I ever again meet the man who so wronged me, my vengeance is certain."

"He shall die, and by my hand!"

The listener trembled like a leaf as he heard these words, and with difficulty he crawled to where he felt sure he could get a view of the man who spoke them.

He was almost overcome by his emotions.

"I have often told you that my worst enemy on earth resembled me strongly—looked enough like me to be my twin brother."

"Ugalala knows," returned the Indian. "My white brother he save Ugalala life when great bear try tear out heart. Ugalala is a Ute chief. Drink heap whisky, but no forget what Mountain Misery has spoken. Want hear again, so come here now to see Mountain Misery. It is good. Ugalala go find white brother's enemy."

"Think see now—know see. Look!" unfolding the five-dollar note which Black had given him. "Mountain Misery enemy give Ugalala paper get whisky. Whisky choke Ugalala if buy with money of white brother's enemy. See!" and the Indian thrust the green-back into the blaze. "Good. Now go bring bad white man."

From the time the savage had spoken of seeing his foe, the recluse sat watching him in silence.

He seemed unable to move or speak.

He made no attempt to prevent the burning of the bank-note.

Neither did he move when the Indian stalked from the hut.

But how was it with Black?

The words and the voice had nearly taken from him the power of movement, but he at length drew closer to the hut and gazed within. One glance was sufficient.

He saw a man of the same build as himself, and with the same complexion and features. He looked upon his own double.

He saw a man whom he had greatly wronged, robbed, and, as he himself had believed, murdered. There he was, before him, alive, and saying that he only lived for revenge.

Now he knew why Red-Eye had started up in such a manner when he first caught sight of him.

Now he knew that the Indian was about to return to the town in search of him; and, with a terror never previously felt by him, he stole away and sped along the dark passage as though the fiends were on his track. He was, for the time, totally unconscious of the fact that he held a weapon in his hand with which he could defy the pair from whom he was fleeing.

He forgot that he might easily have shot both the savage and the man who sought his life, without running any great risk in so doing. His one aim and thought was flight.

Never had he been so terrified, so filled with a nameless dread, as when gazing at one who appeared, as though from the grave, on a mission of vengeance.

He knew that Red-Eye was close behind him, and he fairly flew down the gorge, and through the cedars, making for a point near the office of his fellow-plotters. Without being observed, he reached the door of the shanty, opened it and fell forward upon the floor senseless!

Brooks and Saunders were beyond measure astonished.

They poured brandy over his head, and into his mouth; themselves in dread that something had happened that would mar their plans, and bring them to justice.

Ere long Black revived, but he evidently did not for a time realize what had so recently transpired. It was plain to his partners that he had had a severe shock of some kind, and they were intensely eager to learn the particulars. They, therefore, administered another dose of brandy.

He had no sooner swallowed it than he sprang wildly to his feet, crying out:

"Bar the door! In the fiend's name, bar the door."

"Rest easy, Black! The door is all right. But what in the name of wonder, has happened to you?" asked Brooks.

"Give me a rest. Let me think—by St. Iago, let me think!"

"What's struck ye, pard?" inquired Saunders.

"Has the biz bu'sted?"

"No, by crackey!"

Black darted to the door, as he almost yelled these words.

He opened it, and gazed up and down the single street of the town. He then closed the door, and placed his back against it, breathing heavily.

His swarthy face was ashen, his teeth set, and his eyes fairly snapped.

Saunders and Brooks instinctively shrunk from him.

Again he burst forth, vehemently:

"Pards, you're right! There's work ahead, and for this night at that. I've made a discovery. I've seen a ghost!"

"I followed that Indian I spoke to you about, up the mountain, to a wild spot, far up the gorge in the range. There I came upon a hut, and in it was a man whom I had killed, years ago, and robbed."

"He was alive, and told that red the story of his wrongs, and that ever since he has been searching for me. The Indian started off to bring me, but I got ahead of him, and here I am."

"When I entered the hotel this afternoon, Red-Eye sprang to his feet, and gazed at me in a manner that made me suspicious. His actions were then a mystery, but I understand it all now."

"This foe of mine, whom I had supposed to be dead, is a pard of that savage and he resembles me very strongly, both in face and build."

"Why didn't ye bore the cuss?" demanded Saunders, quickly.

"Why? Well, it is the strangest thing in the world, now I think of it, that I didn't. But it is best so. Had I killed him, that would have ended the matter, and we might have carried out our plot successfully, but I should have been in great danger from the rope. Now, don't you see, my discovery of to-night has given us a

chance to change our plans in a very favorable manner?"

"I can be dead to the world, and consequently can avoid all the trouble our first plan would, if carried out, have caused. You see, don't you?"

"I fail to tumble," said Saunders.

"I, too, am in the dark," put in Brooks.

"It's as plain as A B C. Didn't I tell you this infernal hermit looks as much like me as a twin brother? Very well; he and Darington are to die!"

"We put my clothes on him, and the consequence is that Black and Darington are reported killed on the mountains, after the sale of the mine and the receipt of the money. I still remain alive, with the big bunch of bonds; and we all levant down the range with our boodle, where I can communicate with my brother in Denver, and with his aid work the mine for all it's worth. See?"

The two men started forward, and each caught a hand of Black, which they wrung in speechless admiration of their highly gifted partner in villainy.

At length Brooks found utterance.

"Bill Black, you ought to be President of the United States! Your head is long, and level into the bargain."

"Dog'd if you hain't got more brains than a half-dozen men of the ordinary sort!" supplemented Saunders.

"Well," said the highly-complimented worthy, "now you know the programme as rearranged, pards; and, I reckon, you have an idea of the night's work."

"That Indian addressed the recluse as 'Mountain Misery.' That name will do for us. I have no desire to resurrect the true one. It is enough that the man has crawled, as it were, from the tomb to further my plans."

"I'll guide you to the entrance to the little break in the rocks, at the end of which is this Mountain Misery's cabin. You must capture, gag, and bind him; then leave him secreted where we can use him to-morrow night, but where his red pard will not be able to find him."

"Now, come on! We must act with caution, and before the miners break off work."

Saunders and Brooks at once armed themselves, and the hopeful trio stole from the office, locking the door.

Then, sheltered by the pines and cedars, the three scoundrels made their way up the mountain-side on their errand of death.

CHAPTER IV.

A BOGUS MINE.

"BLACK BROTHERS & CO.,

WHOLESALE DEALERS IN MINERS' SUPPLIES."

A large sign, with this in gilt letters on a black ground, might have been seen over the door of a store on one of the business streets of Denver, Colorado, some ten years ago.

But the firm was not for any length of time known as such in business circles.

The two brothers, John and William Black, who were supposed, from their strong resemblance to each other, to be twins, had come from almost anywhere in the mining regions, having evidently been ramblers for many years from one big strike to another. For some time there were few who took much stock in them; but at length they found a man who suited them as a partner.

This was David Darington.

Knowing him to be possessed of considerable wealth, gained in lucky stock speculations, the two men had for some time had their eyes on Darington, as one who could be made an easy victim to a plot which they had conceived.

Darington had two children, a son and a daughter, each of which had been made legatee by the will of their mother. The property of Mrs. Darington, in her own right, had amounted to \$150,000, consequently her husband and children had fifty thousand each. In addition to this, David Darington, as has been stated, was far from being a poor man.

All these facts were well known to the Black Brothers.

They had seen that it would not be very difficult to influence their intended dupe, as he was confiding in the extreme, and honest to a fault, believing others to be the same. From his having resided, the greater portion of his life in the rural districts, this was perhaps not remarkably strange.

Darington was greatly devoted to his children, and also to his brother, who was unmarried,

and a member of his family. The latter was an extremely diffident, modest, and unassuming man, even said by some to be simple-minded.

Altogether the Darington family were a very happy domestic circle.

The Blacks knew this, and as they were without families of their own, and had none who loved, or even respected them, they hated the Daringtons most cordially because of it. They had sought an introduction to David Darington, cultivated his friendship, agreed with and favored all his ideas and plans, and had very cunningly secured him a large amount of mining-stock, which had greatly risen in value in a short time, enabling him to realize some thousands of dollars by the investment, when he disposed of it.

This had so pleased Darington that he became quite infatuated with the brothers, and they thus adroitly succeeded in influencing him to enter into a co-partnership with them, the firm being known as Black Brothers & Co.

David Darington had, however, been advised against this; men in Denver, with whom he had become friendly, asserting that he was foolish to have any business relations with men who came from no particular place, and whose real character was unknown.

Not only this, but the brothers had the appearance of being treacherous.

The trusting David laughed at these warnings, however, and felt sympathy for the two men, for being, as he believed, thus misunderstood and defamed; the very means his friends adopted to prevent his going into the concern, causing him to be the more easily influenced by the plotters, who, understanding him thoroughly, took advantage of his weak points, and cunningly gained his sympathy and trust.

David Darington resided in a fine mansion in the suburbs of the city, and situated in park-like grounds. His daughter, Della, had just graduated, when called to the death-bed of her mother a year previous to the opening of this story. She was at that time sixteen, and of exceeding great beauty.

She was fair, with wavy golden hair, azure eyes, and purely Grecian features; her form being well developed, though below the medium height. Beautiful in every sense of the word, in form, face, and character, was Della Darington.

The son, Dashiell, was two years the senior of his sister, being, at the time of which we are speaking, nineteen. He was a supple, wiry youth, quick as a flash in motion, and with remarkable strength, although somewhat slender, and not more than five feet, five inches, in height.

He was known among his intimates as "Dash," and a dashing fellow he was; full of fire and energy, and of a romantic and adventurous turn of mind. He had made many trips up and down the range, and had become familiar with mining and camp life; much to the worry of his father, uncle, and sister, when he was off on these expeditions.

Dash was an expert in the use of revolver, rifle, and lasso; taking great pride in his skill in all that pertained to hunting and border life. The brother and sister almost worshiped each other, and both were much attached to their father and also their uncle.

From the first time that they had seen the Black brothers, they had felt an aversion toward them, and had endeavored to influence their father not to associate with the strangers. But, as they saw that he was pained and offended at what he believed to be their lack of charity toward his friends, they desisted in their attempts at influencing him and could only hope that their suspicions were unfounded.

Not until David Darington had informed his children that he was about to enter into partnership with the Blacks, did they become really alarmed; but it was then too late to interfere, as an agreement had already been signed.

Dash, however, resolved to keep a strict watch on the strangers who had thus ingratiated themselves into the confidence of his father; and, in a private interview with the latter, he succeeded in getting his promise not to enter into any heavy business transactions with the two men, without informing him of the full particulars beforehand. The youth was naturally keen-witted, and was besides well informed on almost all necessary subjects in that region.

The Black brothers had induced their new partner to purchase one-third of the "Flush Hand Mine," for a reason which will presently be made known. This was the first move made by them toward carrying out a plot, which they intended should enrich themselves, and ruin Darington, who had now become their easy dupe.

This investment had been for \$25,000, the mine being represented as worth, at that time, fully three times that amount.

It was some time after this before the Blacks played their next card.

This was by causing the two other partners in the mine to offer Darington double the amount he had invested for his share of the "Flush Hand"—namely fifty thousand dollars.

David Darington was overwhelmed with joy, and proud of his business tact and judgment.

John and William Black advised him to accept the offer as the mine might "peter out;" at any rate they decided that it would never bring a higher price. David agreed with them, and they at once concluded to make a trip to Pocketville, where the mine was situated, and close the bargain. William Black was the one who volunteered to accompany Darington, and the latter, dreading the journey not a little, was more than glad of his offer.

But, before the start was made, Black deftly played his main card—the best he held in his hand. This was in the shape of a forged letter, which he pretended had come from a place near Pocketville, their destination.

The letter read as follows:

"PLACERTOWN, COLORADO, June 15th, 187—

"WILLIAM BLACK, Esq.:—

"MY DEAR SIR:—You wrote me in regard to any information I might have concerning mining investments. I am pleased to be able to give you a chance among a thousand. One-third of the 'Pure Pewter,' and one-third of the 'First Show,' can be bought for \$100,000—that is, fifty thousand each—the owner being forced to sell at a terrific sacrifice, for cash, and that immediately, on account of heavy losses at gambling.

"If you know of a party who has the cash, and would like to double it within the year on his investment, write at once.

"Yours truly,

SIDNEY GAINES."

Having, as he thought, already doubled his money on William Black's advice, Darington was the more ready to again invest; especially in the mines mentioned in the letter, for he had heard them quoted high.

It was a large sum, however, and would take every dollar he could command, including the amount he was to receive for his interest in the "Flush Hand;" but, upon deliberation, he decided to investigate matters at Placertown, and if as represented, make the purchase.

The Black brothers were almost frantic in their fiendish exultation.

In reality, the Flush Hand Mine was not worth five thousand dollars, and was owned by the Blacks; Saunders and Brooks being their confederates in the scheme, and pretending to own the balance of the mine.

The \$50,000 to be paid to Darington as a bait, was to be in counterfeit bonds, through the payment of which the plotters were to gain the fifty thousand more, which their victim was to have expressed to him, for the purpose of purchasing one-third of each of the Placertown mines mentioned in the letter.

Thus it will be seen that, should the infamous scheme of the miscreants be successful, they would succeed in swindling Darington out of seventy five thousand dollars.

Yet, even this did not satisfy them.

They had their eyes upon the legacies left the son and daughter by their mother.

To secure these, however, they must be free from suspicion in the present matter.

John Black must remain in Denver, and William would, if possible, plan to have David Darington come to his death by accident. He would contrive to have him fall over a precipice; would go for help, and when the body was found it would be discovered that the corpse had been robbed.

This would leave the Blacks to work out a plot to gain the gold of the children; but they knew this would be a finer game to play than the one they had in hand.

Such had been the pre-arranged scheme of these villains; and we have seen the plotter and his intended victim arrive at Pocketville, and hold consultation with the confederates of the Black Brothers.

We have seen, too, the change in the original plot, brought about by the discovery of the man resembling William Black. This, the latter thought to be more favorable than otherwise.

He believed he could accomplish more if supposed to be dead than if alive.

Dash and Della would have sympathy and confidence in John Black, where none had previously existed, from the fact that John had been bereaved as they had been; his brother having been killed at the same time as their father.

Thus had William reasoned, after he had got-

ten over his fright at seeing the man whom he had believed to be long dead.

He knew that it would not do for the counterfeit money to be found on him, as he would then be lynched, and it would be known that the \$50,000 had been expressed to Darington, which fact would be suspicious in itself.

It would, in any event, force him to outlawry and danger of death, leaving him indeed but little chance of escape.

CHAPTER V.

THE COUNTERPLOT.

Bill Black had but a minute or two the start of Ugalala, when leaving the hut of Mountain Misery; and, as he was not accustomed to the dark passage, the Indian, who glided swiftly after, was but a short distance behind him.

Being in such an excited condition, Black gave little attention to this, believing that he was far in advance of the red-man.

Consequently, Ugalala, whose keen ears detected the passage of some living thing ahead of him, was on the alert; and his amazement and exultation were great, when he perceived the very man he was then out on his way to the town to capture, just turning around the spur of rock.

No longer was there the least doubt in the Indian's mind as to the man he had seen in Red-Eye Roost being the enemy of Mountain Misery.

The savage was confident that this man had, for some unknown cause, followed him from the town; and had, without doubt, stolen to the rude habitation, and heard all, or nearly all, the words that had passed between him and the hermit.

Red-Eye's first intention, upon discovering Black, was to speed forward and capture him; but he, upon reflection, realized that, did the bad white man turn his head and discover him running in pursuit of him, he would speed in his terror, and reaching the town, would cause an alarm.

This, the Indian wished to avoid.

What he wished was to gain possession of the person of this stranger, secretly, if possible.

And again, he had a curiosity to know what connection his white pard's enemy had with the two men who owned the Flush Hand Mine, for he had seen the man, with his traveling companion, pass down the street from the hotel, directly to the office of Saunders and Brooks.

Red-Eye now saw that it was lucky he had watched the two men, for should he not succeed in keeping his intended captive in view he could go to the office, and, by listening, he might gain some information.

The huge gorge was crooked, and as the Indian stole into the same, he saw that his man had disappeared. At once he started down the bed of the rent, and at the next turn was relieved by a sight of Black as he ran around a curve. Ugalala practiced caution, and did not turn another bend until he had made sure that the man he pursued would not discover him.

Thus was the chase kept up until Black entered the belt of cedars and pines, which extended from the entrance of the rent to the town.

Here the Indian had an opportunity to close up with the chase, and was but a short distance from the office when Black dashed in, and fell upon the floor senseless. He then succeeded in crawling directly under the building, which rested upon posts some two feet from the ground. There were cracks in the floor, and the lurking red-man heard every word that was spoken by the trio when Black recovered.

Great was his fury when he learned that Saunders and Brooks, guided by Black, were immediately to set out for the purpose of capturing Mountain Misery.

Red-Eye resolved that both these men should die, and he would then secure Black and take him to the hut, his original plan.

But he felt that he must at once inform his pard of the intent of the conspirators, and also of the rest that he had heard. After this he and his white brother could lie in wait for Saunders and Brooks. The Indian knew these men, and that they were of a character far from honest and trustworthy.

He now saw that they were worse than he had ever suspected, and that they were leagued with Black in crime.

Ugalala was sure that the man who had arrived in Pocketville with Black was to be murdered and robbed by this trio—that he had been lured to the mountains for that particular purpose.

The red-man's brain was clear and active.

He had now almost entirely recovered from his last spree.

Crawling from the darkness beneath the building, and from thence among the dwarf trees, Red-Eye arose and darted at great speed back toward the hut of Mountain Misery, soon arriving there, much to the surprise of the recluse. Breathing heavily, he stood and gazed into the face of his white brother.

"What brings you back so soon?" asked the hermit.

"My white brother's enemy got name. It is Black."

"His heart is black enough, but as for his name, I reckon he has more than one. I did not know him by that name. Why?"

"He got face like white brother. Ugalala see this. He think, now know, he same as try kill Mountain Misery many moons ago."

"You know this? You must, or you would not speak it. Can it be that you are not mistaken, that I am at last, after long years of search, at the end of the trail, and near my revenge?"

"Ugalala, I shall owe you much, if through you I secure my vengeance, and rid the earth of the murderous wretch who robbed me of my all and left me for dead. Where is the demon now? Explain, for I do not understand!"

"Black, he bad white man. He give money when Ugalala start up quick, and look at him. He no know why. Mebbe so think know him, and tell other white man he crooked."

"Then he follow Ugalala up mountain. Mebbe so want know why look hard at him. Heap afraid. Come here. Crawl up to hut. He see Mountain Misery. Hear council words. Then run back fast, but Ugalala eyes sharp."

"Ugalala see him. Follow trail to shanty where Saunders and Brooks stay. Crawl under shanty. Hear all words. Black say he go to mountain, see man he kill many moons ago. Heap scare. Then he get better."

"Then he say, man in hut must die. Say to Saunders and Brooks, go tie man in hut, then hide him. When kill other white man, then throw over rocks. Throw Mountain Misery over rocks too. Men in town think both strange white men dead. Think bad men in mountains rob after they fall over rocks."

"Put Black's clothes on Mountain Misery. Then all run off with heap money. That what say."

"Saunders and Brooks, they come now to hut. Come to knock my white brother on head. Then tie. Then hide in rocks. When next sun gone, then kill. White man come with Black to Pocketville. At Red-Eye Roost now. That all. What do?"

"Ugalala say, kill Saunders, kill Brooks, when come here. Then Ugalala, he go get Black. Bring to white brother. Heap talk. What do? Mebbe so come catch now, soon."

"Great Heavens! Well, you have brought information indeed. More than I ever dared hope to gain in my life. But you confuse me."

"So that scoundrel is here, and is about to carry out another infamous plot of murder and robbery. But well bask the demon."

"Ugalala,"—rising up, and speaking rapidly, and with great vehemence—"we'll form a counterplot, and if possible save this stranger and his money. We must save him, and bring those fiends to justice, or else take justice into our own hands."

"You say, they are coming to capture me! Well and good! I wish them to do so. They will not kill me—not, at least, until they cast this other man off some precipice, will they have use for me. Yes, I want them to capture me. Ugalala, you must do as I order!"

The Indian manifested great surprise.

"You must secrete yourself," the recluse continued, "and witness my capture. Then you must follow my captors to the place they are to hide me until I am wanted."

"Curb your passions, and do as I advise! When they have left me bound, and perhaps gagged, then you can release me, and we can then proceed with our own plans. This stranger ought to be warned, but perhaps that would not be best just now."

"Come, hide at once! We can talk when we meet again. I shall pretend to be asleep, and shall not defend myself. Quick, before they come!"

Mountain Misery spoke in low and impressive tones, but he was greatly excited, and used many gestures.

He was clothed in buckskin garments, that had evidently been made by his own hand, and he wore a belt of weapons about his waist. Although a self-confessed recluse, he gave proof by his appearance, that he paid quite as much

attention to his personal appearance as did many in the town; indeed more than was practiced by the miners, for his face was shaved, all except a goatee—strange to say—the almost counterpart of that worn by William Black.

The resemblance between the two men was indeed remarkable.

It was scarcely to be wondered at that it had struck the Indian so forcibly as to cause him to break through his usual stoical indifference to anything he might see or feel.

Red-Eye was at first, after hearing the words of his hermit friend, very adverse toward complying with the orders given him; but soon he stole away into the darkness as requested, perfectly dumfounded and speechless at this undreamed-of decision on the part of Mountain Misery.

The Indian had believed that his white brother would at once decide to kill the white men.

A moment's reflection, however, caused him to perceive that there would be more opportunity to gain revenge, and torture the conspirators with fear and horror, by doing as Mountain Misery proposed. Besides, the bad white men would all undoubtedly be in his, and his white brother's power; death being their doom in any event, if matters worked well. And then, the strange white man would be saved.

So Ugalala stole to covert, and his mountain pard lay down upon the blankets which he had spread upon the floor of his rude habitation; breathing heavily, as if in deep slumber, a single torch dimly illuminating the scene.

In a little time, the sound of the approach of the miscreants—their boots, although they were evidently very cautious, making a scraping noise upon the rocks—was heard; and Red-Eye could see Brooks and Saunders, stealing, half-bent, and with knives and revolvers in their hands, into the hut.

The sight was an exceedingly trying one to the Indian, forcing him to practice all his strength of will to keep himself from darting into the hut, and protecting his white pard.

He could easily see the interior of the rude dwelling from where he crouched, and he beheld both the miscreants spring like panthers upon the outstretched form of Mountain Misery.

Then followed a short struggle, some half-smothered ejaculations, and a few low but deep curses. The hermit had been secured.

After this, the torch was extinguished, and Red-Eye heard the heavy footsteps, as the two men bore away, down the dark passage, the bound and gagged form of his friend.

He stole stealthily on after them, his black eyes flashing, and his knife clutched.

Woe be to the abductors, did they in their cruelty, pass a certain limit! For the savage could undergo but a little stronger strain upon his uncurbed temper—could undergo but little more torture on account of the pain he knew his white pard to be suffering!

CHAPTER VI.

REPORTING PROGRESS.

RED-EYE had no difficulty in keeping close after the ruffians who bore Mountain Misery from his hut.

By the time the huge rent in the range was reached, the sun had set, and the eastern side of the mountain was in deep gloom. The plotters had, therefore, little fear of being detected; but, after reaching the wooded belt, they advanced along up the base of the range, with great care and caution, the Indian following close upon their track.

Neither of them spoke a word.

But a short distance from the entrance of the gorge, the red-man saw Black dart out from a clump of cedars, and confront his accomplices.

The pair cast their human burden roughly to the earth.

Black's face was perfectly fiendish.

"Thank the fiends, you have succeeded!" he hissed. "Let me look again at the face of the cuss. He would have ruined us all, had we not nabbed him; and that infernal red-skin would have got us lynched."

Stooping down, Black put his face closely to that of Mountain Misery.

"Ya-as, we got the condemned coyote," said Saunders; "but danged if I care to tote him far. It's mighty rough navigatin' jist about here, pard."

"He's as strong as a bull buffalo," put in Brooks, breathing hard; "and we'd had to bore him, I reckon, if he hadn't been asleep. He's a regular tiger. Where'll we cache him?"

"Curses on you, Bentley Bowen!" muttered

Black, without heeding the question put to him; "you have turned up alive to balk my plans, have you? Ha! ha! I have been luxuriating in your gold, while you have been living like a coyote in the rocks."

"I was forced to fawn and act the true friend a long time before I got the drop on you; and it is some consolation now to know that my blade failed in its duty, as you have had to live in poverty and lone misery. But I'll soon end your career, and use you as a tool to gain another fortune—use your corpse to personate my own!"

"You'd better choose a more secret place than this, Black, to wag your tongue," suggested Brooks. "That Indian might be on our trail. Where shall we tote him?"

"Up 'long the range, by the old shafts, is about the only show for hidin' the cuss," said Saunders.

"Pards, you've done well! We'll work the racket, dead sure," put in Black. "I've been to the hotel, and Darington is sound asleep. He'll snooze until morning, I reckon. Before that time we'll have it arranged. Blast you, Bentley!"—this to the helpless captive—"do you know why I picked you out in the long ago as a victim?"

"It was because you resembled me; and now you're in for it again. Your face has given you away. Just so; struggle and foam! I know my words and presence are torture to you. I know you'd give much to reply to me, but you are helpless."

"Take that!" spitting viciously in the face of his victim. "Enjoy your thoughts. In twenty-four hours from this you'll be a mangled corpse at the bottom of Devil's Gulch. Boys, tote him along!"

"Better hide him as near the gulch as possible, pards," said Black, as they started; "for it is there we must play our last card in this game. Everything has been in our favor thus far. As to that red, I reckon he's drunk again by this time, considering his duty done when he had warned his friend of the mountain hut. On with him!"

Saunders and Brooks proceeded onwards, Black taking the lead, and the furious Ugalala following them; his strength of will being forced to the front to control himself.

Thus on, keeping at the base of the range, they went, passing some distance above the town, when they struck up the mountain-side, following a narrow path, which showed plain evidence of having been much used in the past, though not very recently.

High up, this path led winding around rocky spurs, and along narrow shelves, causing it to be quite difficult for Red-Eye to keep within favorable distance of those he was following like a sleuth-hound.

Finally they disappeared altogether, as if they had entered the solid rock wall; but the Indian knew every crook and turn in the range, and was satisfied that he knew the place the miscreants had decided to secrete their victim. He therefore crouched within a clump of stunted cedars and awaited, with the patience of his people, the return of the "bad white men."

He had not long to wait.

They were eager to return to the town as soon as possible. Ere long they passed the covert of the savage, at a fast walk, and in silence on their return.

When the trio had disappeared, Red-Eye darted along the path to the point where he had first lost sight of them, and near which, he knew, they had left their captive.

It was a dark portion of the trail, and he remembered that here some mining-shafts had been at one time started, but had been abandoned as not worth working.

Catching up a pine knot which the bad whites had used and cast aside, the Indian passed into the nearest dark shaft, and, striking a match, re-ignited the torch.

Holding it close to the ground, he began his examination.

The trail, he soon saw, led into a dark and narrow passage through the side of the range.

With a grunt of satisfaction Red-Eye crawled into it, his eyes upon the ground.

"Bad white men heap big fools. Think Ugalala blind as owl when sun shines."

Thus commented the Indian.

On he went, along several winding passages, and at length he discovered Mountain Misery lying upon the floor of a small chamber in the rocks.

Thrusting the torch into a seam in the wall, Red-Eye jerked his knife, severed the gag and the cords, and his pard was free.

He strove to speak, but could not at first

articulate, so distended had been his jaws by the torturing gag.

"Waugh!" broke from the red-man, in fury.

"Ugalala heap mad. Want kill. Want scalp bad white men!"

As soon as Mountain Misery could control himself, he pointed toward the entrance, with wild gestures, crying out:

"Follow the devils, Ugalala! Follow them, for they are going to select the point for their murderous deed. We must know all their movements. I will remain here. Find out all you can in the town and then come to me!"

"Good! Waugh!"

So saying, the savage stole back toward the entrance of the shaft, leaving the torch, but he seemed to know all the windings before him.

In a few moments he sprung out upon the shelf opposite the shafts, and then down, halting now and then to listen and to peer around, jutting rocks. He thus succeeded in reaching a point from which he could hear every word of the plotters, for he gained a view of their shadowy forms in time to prevent himself from betraying his presence.

The three were standing upon the verge of the shelf, gazing down into the dark depths of the gulch.

"Yes; this is the best place," the Indian heard Black say. "First, for the reason that the shelf is narrow, and it would not appear strange that a horseman might, by his animal taking sudden fright, be precipitated to his death. Again, there is a shelf some thirty feet below here, and that will allow for a big enough fall."

"We don't want them so badly smashed up as to defy recognition, and besides, I'll have to be let down by a rope to get those bonds from Darington after he goes over. If we made the rifle at any other point, the bodies might be bruised to a jelly, and the bonds perhaps hopelessly injured."

"The place is all right, and the sooner it's over, the better," said Brooks.

"Ya-as," agreed Saunders, "the locate is jam-up, and I think too the job order be did as soon as possible. But how are ye goin' ter git the ole coon ter ride up hyer?"

"I'll work him all right," replied Black. "He has no idea where the Flush Hand is located, and you can leave the office with a notice on the door to the effect that you've both gone to the mine, and will fix the business there. I'll contrive to delay Darington, and that will explain why you did not remain longer at the office. There's more than one way to skin an eel."

"How are ye goin' ter manage ter have the cuss in the lead, when he doesn't know the trail?" inquired Saunders.

"Easy enough. I'll stop to fix my girth just below here, and then I'll gallop up to pass him, and take the lead again. As I go by, I'll give him a welt that'll finish his ride and send him flying over the gulch wall. That's the programme."

"And whar'll we-uns be while ye're doin' the biz? Don't ye want us ter help?"

"Not until I whistle. When I have done for him I'll want you, for you'll have to let me down to that lower shelf."

"An' the t'other cuss—when does he work in the game?"

"I want him brought and laid in those cedars,"—pointing to the thicket in which the Indian was at that moment listening—"I'll throw him over as soon as I have knocked Darington in the head. You can lay him in there any time to-morrow. He'll be as safe from observation there as in the shaft."

"Nobody comes this way once in a coon's age for that matter."

"Better bring the old man to the office during the forenoon to fix up the papers. Then we can sift in talk to count on the game and make it O. K. about our being away when he comes for his fifty thousand."

"Why can't we pay him the 'queer,' if he ain't well up as regards the stuff, and then run in a racket on him 'bout there bein' a plot to rob him? In that way we might get him to levant in the night ter 'scape from the hell-yuns o' Pocketville."

"That's a good idea—cuss me, if it ain't!" agreed Black. "Saunders, you're a brick for plotting. I reckon we might fix it that way, and make things run more smoothly. But, let us get back to town. If that Injun ain't there, I shall be a little suspicious."

"Oh! blast Red-Eye!" burst out Saunders, contemptuously. "He ain't woth spendin' a thought onto. He's chin-deep in whisky 'bout now, ye can jist bet!"

Ugalala had gained much valuable informa-

tion, and was glad that he had heard what passed between the conspirators.

He now knew that he must get back to the town, and be there in advance of the "bad white men." As soon, therefore, as they started he followed cautiously, until at length he was enabled to dart around them through the thickets; and he entered Red-Eye Roost some minutes before them. There he seated himself in silence, taking notice of nothing except the decanters behind the bar.

By this time the "Roost" was half-filled with the rough men of the mines, who had begun their night's debauch, while the gamblers were at their tables, and busy with the "pasteboards."

Soon, Black made his appearance by himself, and passed directly through the crowd to the stairs, seeming desirous of avoiding observation as much as was possible. But he shot a sweeping glance around the room, that settled with a look of relief upon the form of the Indian. Red-Eye gave no sign of having perceived his presence, and Black at once passed to the upper story.

Still the Indian remained silent and motionless as a statue.

At length Black reappeared, and having evidently watched his opportunity, made his way out of doors while a throng of miners were crowded before the bar.

But Red-Eye also stole out by a rear door, passed into and among the cedars to the office of Saunders and Brooks, when he crawled beneath the building as previously, having the satisfaction of knowing he had arrived before Black. The latter, however, soon entered, and having locked the door, cried out:

"Everything's all right, pards. The Indian is in the bar, and Darington is still fast asleep. We must run the racket this very night. Delays are dangerous."

"That red-skin is deeper and more cunning than you give him credit for. He's not drunk—not a bit of it. Satan roast him! I don't believe he's swallowed a drop since I treated him when we first arrived!"

CHAPTER VII.

VIEWING THE GROUND.

"It 'pears ter me, Bill Black, that ye're mighty 'feard of an Injun," said Saunders. "Reckon ye're gettin' shaky."

This was after Black's assertion that their work must be accomplished that very night.

"I'm not afraid of a score of reds," was the reply, as he poured himself out a glass of brandy; "but this is a dangerous game, and ropes are plenty in Pocketville, with any number of roughs ready and eager to jerk a man up a limb on a very slight pretense. It is my firm opinion that the Indian will watch every move we make; and if it would not draw too much attention to us, I'd pick a quarrel with him in the bar and shoot him."

"That would never do, Bill! If you sh'd try that on, thar'd be more'n one galoot jump ye fer keeps. Crystal Charley, fer one, would shoot es quick es a gar-fish ef yer bucked ag'in' ther cuss. He's es squar' es Injuns go, an' more so, or he wouldn't stick his finger in our pie."

"Tell yer what, I'll go over an' buy Red-Eye a jug o' pison! That'll make him just happy, an' he'll hump himself up-range fer a big drunk, not showin' up in a week."

"Go and try it on," said Black, eagerly—"but no, it won't do! Don't you see, he'd strike for that but at once, and then he'd find out his white pard had been captured. Perhaps I'm too suspicious. Let him slide; but, at the same time, we'll keep our eyes peeled for him, and plug him at sight if we run foul of him out of town. Confound a good Indian, I say! They're altogether too good for our sort."

"I'm goin' to write to John, in Denver, and I'm so sure of working our racket that I'll tell him everything is O. K. It won't take me a minute, so keep cool, and brace up with that brandy."

When Black had finished the letter, he sprung to his feet nervously, exclaiming:

"Now, the first thing is for you, pards, to go back to that deserted mine and strip the clothes off Mountain Misery, as the red calls him. By the way, did you ever hear of his having that handle before?"

"Ya-as," replied Saunders, "a heap o' times; an' thar's a number o' the Pocketville crowd what has see'd him when out prospectin', but not close to. I never clapped peepers on him till to-night; did you, Brooks?"

"Never; but I've often heard of him."

"Well, never mind," said Black; "I'm glad he's known to some of them, if I have to step

into his boots. I say, you must go back, and I'll give you a suit of clothes—a match for those I have on now. I'll drop them out of my window to you, at Red-Eye Roost."

"You can leave Bowen in the cedars I spoke of, and bring his buckskins back a piece on the trail, hiding them where I can put them on after the biz is through with."

"The hostler at the Roost is a man I know of old, and I can get the horses out for the trip, telling the story as it is to be understood by Darington. Have your own horses ready in the thicket. Let it be about the third bend or turn in the trail this side the old mine."

"Fix these matters, you two, and I'll run the rest of the racket. Can you do it, and how long before you'll be ready?"

"We-uns kin take ther nags along now, I reckon," suggested Saunders.

"I've no objections," said Black. "In fact, that will save time. But, remember, you must return here to the office in order to fix up the biz with Darington. I need you to get the old cuss frightened so he'll make no objections, but rather be eager for a night start. I must have those papers signed, and the money paid over. You received the 'queer' of course, by express, did you not?"

"It's O. K. in the desk there," answered Brooks.

"But," said Saunders, "s'posin' ther big stake o' Government bonds doesn't come on ther stage to-night? Then we-uns'll hev all our trouble fer nothin'."

"Do you take me for a fool?" burst out Black, in anger. "Do you think, after months of planning and plotting the finest work John and I ever did, that we'd play a losing game, or not know the money is on the table?"

"When anybody wins, I win; and when I fail to know what's in the 'pot,' and not rake it in on time, then you may talk!"

"Don't get huffy, Bill. Couldn't ther hearse break down, or ther maskers hold her up?"

"That's true," the chief plotter admitted, "but I'll bet high nothing of the kind occurs this time. The stage will be here when you return."

"I'll wake Darington up, take him to the office, and make him get the package to-night. Then I'll have a chance to frighten him into making a break out of the town. I hope there'll be a row in Red-Eye Roost. That would work in our favor. But, we're wasting time."

"Go to the old mine at once, and make the change of clothing. I'll make a ghost of Mountain Misery this hitch, or die trying! He'll stay dead this time, I'll guarantee."

Black appeared more fiendish than ever as the time drew near to act; and his pards knew, by his manner and actions, that he was far from feeling the confidence he endeavored to put on and express.

The Indian seemed never absent from his mind, and he kept cursing him continually.

Had he known that Red-Eye lay under the cabin, listening to every word, the villain would have indeed had good grounds for fearing the savage would thwart his plans. But Ugalala lingered not, after finding that the two conspirators were preparing to return to the old mine.

He stole out from beneath the office, and sped through the pines and cedars, and along the base of the range, until he reached the narrow winding trail that led to the abandoned shaft.

But little time elapsed before he once more stood before Mountain Misery.

"Well!" exclaimed the latter, in some surprise, "you have returned sooner than I expected. Something important must have occurred. Don't tell me that demon has fled, has escaped my vengeance?"

"He no run. He down in Pocketville. Ugalala follow to cabin. Crawl under again. Hear heap talk. Much heap money come on stage for Darington. He sell mine to Saunders and Brooks. They pay with bad money."

"Black he heap scare of Ugalala. Think red-man cunning as fox. Think know too much, so not wait for another night. Make Darington ride up mountain this night. No wait longer."

"Saunders and Brooks, they come now. Come change Mountain Misery clothes, then put him in cedars, on shelf. Put on clothes of Black. Must tie up. Put gag in mouth quick."

"By heavens!" Bentley Bowen burst out; "you are worth your weight in gold, Ugalala. Yes; fix me just as you found me, and then hide where you can watch that pair of devils. You must find out where they put their horses. We want one of those animals. I have a plan of my own on hand."

"When ride near place where knock Darington on head, Black he stop fix girth. Then ride fast after Darington. When go past, hit him."

"So that's it, is it? I'm glad you told me of this. Go now, and secrete one of the horses, and return as soon as you can. But, first: tie and gag me."

Red-Eye did as his white pard directed, and then grasped the pine-knot, and ran to the entrance of the shaft. There he extinguished his torch, and hid it, as it would tell tales if found.

He then dashed into covert, and had but a short time to wait, when Black and Saunders appeared, dimly outlined in the darkness.

The pair entered the mine, procuring another torch; and, as soon as they had disappeared, the Indian stole down the trail. He soon gave a grunt of satisfaction, for he discovered the two horses. The plotters had prepared themselves for instant flight, if necessary. The saddles were supplied with all requisites for camping, and a long trail.

Red-Eye knew that Saunders and Brooks would be obliged to return to Pocketville, to pay over the bogus money to Darington, and sign the necessary papers. There would, therefore, be ample time for himself and Mountain Misery to form a plan of action in connection with what was so soon to occur, if Black sought to carry out his proposed plot.

If the latter, when he returned to the hotel, should notice the absence of the Indian from the bar, then he would be more suspicious than ever; and Red-Eye was exceedingly anxious to cut free his white pard again, and hasten back once more to the town.

Consequently, he stole up the trail, and hid in the cedars; soon being relieved, upon beholding Saunders and Brooks emerge from the old mine, carrying Mountain Misery along with them.

They placed their living burden within the cedars, where Black had directed; and gave utterance to sounds of relief, when this portion of their task was done.

"Well, I'll be hanged," said Brooks, "if I ever saw two men look more alike! The clothes help too! I'd swear it was Bill Black!"

"I say," whispered Saunders, "sling ther torch back inter ther mine, an' I'll fotch ther cuss's duds. An' you, lay whar you air till boss Black 'roves! He'll gi'n yer a send-off—the last ye'll git this side o' kingdom come, I'll swar!"

"It's rough ter be wiped out, but it's a dang sight rougher ter skip over ther range as another man, while he perambulates 'round with your cog, enjoying himself."

That's ther programme, howsomever, Mountain Misery. Yer misery air 'bout ter be brung to a end. So long!"

The precious pair then proceeded down the trail, carrying every article of apparel they had taken from the form of the recluse.

Hardly had they vanished around a spur of rock, when Ugalala sprung into the cedars, and for the second time slashed his white brother free; also relieving him of the gag.

"Thank you, ever so much," said the hermit, in grateful tones. "Those wretches are merciless. They are almost as fiendish as the villainous assassin they are in league with, and I shall have no mercy on them? Did you find the horses, Ugalala?"

"Ugalala find horses. Two. They in bushes near trail. Short walk. Come!"

The Indian assisted his white friend to his feet; and, had it been light, he would have been astonished at the increased resemblance he bore to his enemy, after the change in his attire.

They went stealthily along to the clump of cedars, and there found the horses.

"Here," said the hermit, "I will await for further developments. You must now return to the town, and watch all three of those men. Follow them up, for I may need your assistance."

"There are lassoes on these saddles, which I'll bring into good use on the owners. We'll beat the devils at their own game."

"Return, Ugalala, to Red-Eye Roost; for that villain Black, will be disturbed at your absence. Be discreet, my noble red pard, and we'll win!"

Mountain Misery spoke in tones of the fullest assurance.

The Indian, with a wave of his hand, stalked away down the trail, in the direction of the town.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

LEFT alone, Bill Black paced the floor of the office, with nervous tread.

"For nearly a year," he muttered, in low but deep soliloquy, "I have played, with John's help, a big game, for big stakes, and played it fine. Now it is near the end."

"I shall rake in that fifty thousand to-night, as easy as I did the twenty-five. But it's dangerous, and now I have another side issue included in the deal—the death of the man I had so long believed dead."

"What makes me so nervous, I wonder? Confound that Indian! That expressionless face of his haunts me, as though it meant something after all. And Mountain Misery, as the red called him—well, I've caused him considerable misery, that's a fact!"

"But I'll end it for him this night. Dave Darington dies, and Bentley Bowen—yes, and by St. Iago, that red-skin also goes on the long dark trail, before I levant from this unhealthy locality! I shouldn't feel secure at any place, I don't believe, while I knew Red-Eye was alive."

"Well, everything must go on as I have arranged it. There is no other way. Darington goes over the cliff, and Bowen keeps him company. The scheme must succeed. I have never yet failed in any important plan, and confidence is one-half the hand one holds in any game."

"Curse the time—how it drags! The toot of the stage-horn would be sweet music to my ears just now. I'll take a swallow of brandy, and then to Red-Eye Roost, and ascertain if that good Injun of mine is still on hand. If he isn't, I'll get more suspicious than ever."

"I ought to have bribed the hostler to watch the red, but I'm not sure that I can trust Dick—devil take him! It's a long time since I knew him, and he may have turned over a new leaf, and repented of his crookedness. He was a sweet cuss, to be sure!"

Hastily pouring out a glass, full nearly to the brim with brandy, he gulped it down as if it had been water. He then strode to the door, opened it with caution, and listened intently.

Sounds of revelry increased from Red-Eye Roost, and he began to fear that Darington might be awakened, and ascertain that he was not in bed, nor even in his room; and this might awaken suspicions in the mind of his intended victim. He must therefore act at once.

Leaving the light burning, Black opened the door again, and passing out, closed it, and then started up the street. Just as he reached the vicinity of Red-Eye Roost, he heard the welcome sound of the bugle, announcing the approach of the stage; and, as the door of the hotel was open, the whooping and yelling crowd inside poured out to witness the disembarkation from the vehicle, and hear the news from up the range.

Black made his way through the bar, and up at once to his room.

To his great relief, he heard Darington still breathing heavily. In his anxiety he had forgotten the Indian, and he had not noticed whether he was in the room below.

Black was greatly excited.

The movements, acts, and words of the next few hours, he knew would decide whether he was to be rich or poor—ay, whether he was to live or die!

The bugle notes sounded louder as the stage drew near, and the yells of the mob in front of Red-Eye Roost were terrific.

The villain knew he had gone too far in the arrangements for the night's work to hesitate, or put matters off until later; in fact, he felt that, should he do so, he would certainly fail—that the Indian would discover Mountain Misery, and then the pair would hunt him to the death. He began pounding on the door.

There was no sound from within.

Again he knocked, and cried out:

"Darington! Oh, Darington!"

The occupant of the bed sprang upward, in a sitting posture, and then his voice was heard.

"What's it? What do you want?"

"It's I, Darington—Black. Open, will you?"

Just then, the din below became more startling, mingled with the bugle blasts.

"What the mischief is up?" exclaimed Darington. "Is that Gabriel's horn?"

Black was, by this time, becoming desperate. He kicked on the door.

"Let me in, I say, Darington! I want to speak to you."

The door was quickly unlocked.

Black dashed inside, closing it, and locking it after him.

"What's the difficulty?" inquired Darington.

"Is the Old Nick broke loose in the town? We are not in any danger, are we? Why on earth don't you speak, man?"

This was said rapidly, and in some excitement.

"Wait till I light the candle," answered Black, with some trepidation. "We are in no immediate danger, but it is bound to come before morning. The stage has arrived. You must get your money, and fix up the papers with Saunders and Brooks at once. We must leave this burg secretly, or we are doomed!"

By this time Black had succeeded in lighting a candle.

The two men gazed into each other's faces. Darington was speechless in his fright.

"Dress yourself!" said Black. "Don't show any alarm. That will only lessen our chances. The room below is full of desperate characters, and I have every reason to believe they think we have a large amount of money with us. Brooks or Saunders must have been indiscreet enough to speak of your affairs. They could have got out in no other way."

"But, good heavens! Have we not a right to our own money? Is there no respect for law in this section? Is it possible that one cannot travel here in safety?"

Darington presented a picture of helpless terror. He seemed dumfounded, and the awful din below served to keep him in that state, if not to increase its intensity.

At length Black spoke:

"We'll get out of this, if you do as I advise. My life is as precious to me as yours can be to you. I ran this risk on your account, but I admit I would not have come to Pocketville, had I known the character of those who seem to rule the town."

"I know," returned his companion, "that it is through my own selfishness and love of gain that I am here; and, if I lose my life, it will be through no fault of yours. I'll do whatever you suggest. I have no doubt you are right; we must get away from here."

Darington then began, in a hasty manner, to dress himself.

"The first thing to be done," continued Black, "is to go to the office, and if we are so lucky as to find those fellows in, insist upon having the business settled to-night, or not at all; of course, explaining our reasons."

"Yes, that will be the best. I don't care to remain here an hour longer. Have you made any arrangements in regard to our horses? And do you know the trail to Placertown well enough to travel there by night?"

"I'll attend to the animals. Once in the saddle, I'll feel safe. I have no fears of going astray."

"Good! Had you not better request the person who has charge of the express-box to bring the package for me to my room, and I'll sign his book?"

"I'll see if you can work it that way," said Black, glad of an excuse for going down-stairs; for the Indian had again been brought forcibly to his mind. He, at once, left the room, and went below.

The stage had halted at the door of Red-Eye Roost, and nearly all the frequenters of the bar and gaming-rooms were inside.

Ugalala lay outstretched upon a bench, seemingly fast asleep. For all that, the wily red-man had, but that very moment, entered the bar-room. He had left Mountain Misery in a clump of cedars, with the horses that had been secreted by Saunders and Brooks; and had, by a more direct course, reached the town about the same time they did.

The latter pair found a light burning in their office, but no one was within.

They helped themselves to liquor, and then lighting their cigars, seated themselves.

They had heard the bugle and confusion, and knew the stage had arrived.

Meanwhile Black had given orders in regard to the express package. This done, he succeeded in obtaining a few words in private with Dick, the hostler, who promised to lead his horse and Darington's into the cedars, when no prying eyes were liable to observe him.

But, not a step had the villain taken that the eyes of Ugalala had not followed him.

The Indian knew that the money had arrived for Darington, and that the time for action was near at hand.

Black went again up-stairs. The express messenger was soon seen coming down and in a few minutes the two travelers followed. Although Red-Eye knew Darington to be a "good white man," he yet felt a shade of contempt for him, as he saw that he was very nervous, and apparently apprehensive of danger at any moment.

When the two passed out, the Indian again repaired to his lair beneath the office. But he remained only long enough to satisfy himself that all was progressing as Black had planned.

He then returned toward the hotel.

Red-Eye passed through the cedars, near the stables, on his way to rejoin Mountain Misery, just in time to hear Dick, as he led the horses of Darington and Black into the shades, where he had been instructed to make them fast.

Having thus satisfied himself that the time for the tragedy was near at hand—that the plot, as he had heard the same detailed by Black to Brooks and Saunders, was to be carried out in every particular—the savage sped up the range, to inform his white pard, Mountain Misery.

CHAPTER IX.

BEARING A CHARMED LIFE.

THE Indian had proceeded but a short distance, when he suddenly halted, turned, and retraced his steps to Red-Eye Roost.

By this time, the crowd was within the bar, and Ugalala discovered one of the slaves of drink, lying upon a bench, fast asleep.

Watching his opportunity, Red-Eye gained a position near the sleeper, without having been observed. Drawing off his tattered blanket, he spread it over the unconscious slumberer, then took his hat and rested it upon the man's forehead, the brim covering his face. He then darted from the room, satisfied that he had not been detected in the trick.

Standing in the darkness, beyond the open door, the red-man waited to see if his ruse would prove of any advantage.

A satisfied "waugh" broke from his lips, as he beheld Black re-enter the bar, and gaze about him suspiciously. At last he perceived the sleeping man, with the hat and blanket of the Indian; and the plotter proceeded to the stairway, satisfied that there would be no interference with his plans by Ugalala.

The latter then hastened to rejoin Mountain Misery.

The moon had not, as yet, cleared a heavy bank of clouds that covered the eastern sky, and a human form could be seen, but indistinctly, at twenty paces.

Listening intently, Red-Eye detected the stealthy approach of human beings.

He withdrew into the thicket, and the next moment saw the forms of two men advancing up the trail. He recognized them. They were Brooks and Saunders. Swiftly but silently, the savage glided up the range.

In a few minutes Ugalala stood by the side of his white pard.

"Well," spoke the latter, "what news has my red brother?"

"Darington he get heap big money. Come on stage. Black he scare Darington heap. Say must go in night from Pocketville. Dick he get gold from Black—pay keep tongue still, and lead horses from stable."

"Horses in cedars. Darington and Black, they come soon. Saunders and Brooks they come now."

"Ugalala see on trail. My white brother know what do. Tell Ugalala quick."

"You say they are really coming?"

"Be here soon quick."

"All right. We are ready. Come, we will crouch in the shades and knock them senseless. No need to tell you to make sure. Strike when I hiss!"

Mountain Misery stationed the Indian, and then crouched a few paces from him, bidding him knock down the man in the lead.

Pretty soon a voice was heard.

"I told Black the red-skin would work no harm to us," said Brooks.

"Yer can't jist allers tell, pard, what's workin' in Red-Eye's brain. Anyway, I 'lows ter scalp him before I glide from Pocketville."

The pair had by this time reached the vicinity of their horses. They were also within a few feet of the lurking avengers.

Suddenly they halted.

"We rung the old cuss Darington in slick," asserted Brooks. "Any flat could fool that old man. He's as cowardly as a coyote. We'll make a big haul this trip, and besides, Black will be rid of the man he thought he had killed long ago. He raked in a pile from that Mountain Misery, it seems. This affair of ours is risky, but a bold game wins nine times out of ten."

"Arter all, I'd g'in a heap if that cuss Mountain Misery hadn't turned up. But for that, Black would have had ter skute, an' take ter slashin' bags ag'in. We-uns had gay ole times before he got on the Denver racket, an' was known as ther Devil o' ther Divide."

"I sorter reckon he'll slide back anyway, though."

"You forget he hasn't played all his cards on the Denver game yet. John Black is in with

the rest of the family, and there's a big pile—the children's share—they propose to gobble up. I'd like to freeze to the girl, but I hear she has a bean, and I—"

At that instant a hiss shot through the cedars, followed by two sounding whacks, and Brooks and Saunders both fell, as if shot through the brain.

"Quick! Bind your man!" directed Mountain Misery. "Secure him to the saddle, and then cut the girth all but a couple of strands. See that you gag him all right!"

Without a word the Indian did as he had been ordered, although at a loss to know what his white brother's object could be.

The latter set the example with his man, and, having accomplished his task, said:

"Help me carry this scum to the point where they left me bound."

"Waugh!" was the satisfactory response.

Brooks was carried, bound and gagged, and laid in Mountain Misery's former position.

Saunders had by this time recovered, and sat upright in his saddle. He had, however, no idea of what was soon to follow.

He realized that he and his pard had been followed and knocked senseless; but he knew not where Brooks then was, nor to whom they owed their capture. Of one thing he was sure. The game was up.

Not a word spoke the captors, but the doomed man could hear their stealthy movements near him.

It was too dark within the thicket to distinguish a human form. The Indian had by this time his instructions. With knife in hand he took his position at the head of the horse upon which Saunders was bound, and clutched the bridle.

It was now sufficiently clear for the margin of the shelf to be distinguished, and beyond it the black and inky depths of the deep, yawning gulch.

Mountain Misery stationed himself at the turn of the trail. Thus the pair waited silently with one of their captives, while the other lay in the thicket just above, on the margin of the shelf overhanging the deep ravine.

Silent as death itself were the surroundings.

This, however, was soon broken by the sound of hoofs on the rocky trail below. But there were no other sounds, no words, although there were riders upon the steeds.

Near, and more near, they came.

At last one of the animals seemed to be halted and turned partially about.

"Ride on, Darington! The trail is clear. I must halt a moment to fix my girth, and then I shall take the lead again."

These words were spoken by Bill Black.

The sound of a single horse walking up the trail continued.

Darington was, evidently, in a deep study.

The next moment his horse reached the point where the recluse was stationed, and the latter clutched his bridle, throwing the horse among the cedars. At the same time he gave utterance to a low hiss and thrust a wad of buckskin into the mouth of the astonished man.

Thus he held man and horse within the shades.

As the hiss sounded, the Indian led the animal upon which Saunders was bound out upon the trail, at the same point at which the horse of Darington should have been had he not been jerked aside by Mountain Misery.

Then Ugalala darted into the thicket.

"Now I'm coming!" shouted Black, his horse springing up the trail. "We'll soon get free from this rough travel."

As he thus spoke the villain jerked his revolver and spurred his horse in frantic bounds up beside the supposed Darington, noticing not, in the uncertain light, that the rider was writhing like a snake in his struggles to break free from the saddle.

Just as Black's voice died away, the butt of his pistol crashed upon the head of Saunders; the horse of the stricken man bounded frantically to the very verge of the awful abyss. At that very moment, the nearly severed saddle-girth parted, and over into the dark depths shot man and saddle—the terrified horse dashing along up the trail!

With a fiendish laugh, Black sprung from his saddle.

We may imagine the tortures of Brooks, lying bound and gagged, as he heard these terrible sounds.

Not an instant did Black, the murder-mad demon, delay.

He sprung into the thicket, yelling:

"This time, Bentley Bowen, you escape me not!"

In taunting laughter, he dragged the miser-

able Brooks forward, and slid him over the edge of the shelf. As he let go his hold, the silvery moon burst forth from the bank of clouds. Black, upon hands and knees, peered over the abyss.

Below he could distinguish two human forms, lying close together, silent and motionless.

Rising to his feet, and rushing to his horse, the assassin nervously loosened the lasso from his saddle-horn.

This done, he turned, and facing the clump of cedars, called out:

"Oh, Saunders! Brooks! I say, I've played the game, and won! Come and help me rake in the stake!"

There was no response.

Black continued coiling the lasso.

Suddenly he paused, his face became ashen, and his look as though petrified.

It was no wonder.

There, in the bright moonlight, was an image of himself!

There was the man he had believed he had killed now for the second time!

There stood Bentley Bowen, Mountain Misery, or his ghost!

The form sprung toward him.

But this broke the spell.

Like flashes of light were the murderer's movements, as he, with a terrific shriek of horror, bounded upon his horse, and drove spurs rowels deep.

Up the mountain trail dashed the terrified horse, disappearing around a spur of rock, while shriek upon shriek of deathly dread and horror shot from the lips of the rider, Bill Black, the baffled assassin!

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED COMPLICATION.

WHEN David Darington was so suddenly and unceremoniously jerked from his horse and gagged, he little dreamed that the act had been a friendly one, done to save his life.

Mountain Misery had no time to waste. The moments were too important for trifling.

Darington must be silenced at any hazard and at once.

Thus had the hermit decided and acted.

The startled man had not noticed the whispered words of caution and explanation so hurriedly given by the one who had so roughly treated him. But he did hear the words shouted out by Bill Black, the sound of the blow given with the butt of the revolver, and the galloping of a horse up the trail.

But Darington believed it was his partner who had been killed, and that, by the same man who had jerked him from his saddle.

The sounds instilled him with a desperate desire to escape, and nerved him to make the attempt. He pulled the gag from his mouth, and crawled quickly away from the spot, and, as it happened, directly toward the rough wall of the mountain-side.

But it also chanced that Darington, as he cleared the cedars, struck a portion of the rock-wall that could be easily climbed—a rugged, broken seam being reached a few yards from the base, which extended through to the spur of rock which jutted out from the main portion of the range.

In great haste the terrified man climbed into and along the seam, for he had not the slightest doubt that Black had been murdered and that the assassins would search for himself. He had little hope of saving his life, but he bent all his strength toward prolonging it.

Barely had Darington reached the shelf when a series of fearful shrieks sounded in his ears, mingled with the rapid clatter of hoofs. These sounds approached.

He believed the murderers were after him.

He had no time to conceal himself, however, before around the point of rocks shot a horseman. Darington stood rigid.

It was Black, the man he had believed to be murdered!

Along he dashed, hatless, his long black hair flying in the wind of his speed, and his eyes staring in fright and horror.

But the terror he had endured and was enduring was fated to be doubled; for, as his horse dashed onward, the gaze of the miscreant was attracted to a rigid form, standing upon a rock but a short distance to his left.

He had just seen, as he believed, one of the men whom he had hurled over into the gulch, standing almost in his path. But now he saw the remaining one with an accusing look, also confronting him.

One horrified glance gave Bill Black. Then

he sunk forward, clutching his arms about the neck of his horse, and retaining only sense sufficient to maintain his position.

Darington understood not the terror manifested by Black at sight of him. It was inexplicable. It appeared that he had escaped death at the hands of the bandits, but why did he flee from him now, instead of joining him, or attempting to save him from the outlaws?

But Darington's wonder was, by no means, to end here.

The next minute, standing in the trail, looking in the direction in which Black had disappeared, was another human figure; and this, as Darington truly believed, was none other than Black himself!

At any rate, he was his exact counterpart, and attired in a similar costume.

Could he really have seen Black before, and mounted upon a horse?

It must have been a delusion, born of his excited and demoralized condition.

While Darington thus stood, speechless, this form also vanished.

David Darington was now the most puzzled man on earth, and Bill Black the most demoralized. The former crouched again in his covert, but not for long. His attention was next attracted to the rough mass of rocks and boulders above him, over which he had fled from the supposed outlaws.

Then the poor man was frightened, in good earnest; for he beheld the tall form of a stalwart Indian, with flying hair, and a belt of murderous weapons about his waist. It was Ugalala; but, his hat and blanket being upon the sleeping man in Red-Eye Roost, he seemed now like a hostile, bent upon rapine and murder.

Both Mountain Misery and his red pard felt greatly concerned in regard to this strange and unexpected turn affairs had taken.

Black had escaped, and Darington was a wanderer, almost frightened into insanity in all probability, and wandering in the wilds, liable to be torn by grizzlies, to fall over some high, or to be robbed and murdered by bandits or range bummers!

Ugalala soon sprung down the cliff, and joined his white brother.

"For Heaven's sake, what have you done with Darington?" asked Mountain Misery.

"Ugalala no see Darington. My white brother pull from horse. What do with him?"

"I left him here, apparently senseless, and thrust a wad of buckskin in his mouth; for I knew all was lost if he yelled."

As he spoke, the recluse pointed out the spot to the savage.

Red-Eye stooped quickly, and picked up the gag of which Mountain Misery had spoken, saying:

"Darington, he heap scare. Hear Black yell, then run in rocks. Ugalala been look, but no see. It is bad."

"Things have turned out curious, I must admit," was the reply; "but we have balked the murderous miscreant, if nothing more. I wonder where he will go now."

"He was the most horror-stricken man I ever saw, when I appeared to him. It was enough to give such a cowardly and superstitious wretch a shock, to see me, whom he believed he had just hurled over into the gulch, standing unharmed; and more especially, as this is the second time he has killed me, in his own belief."

"He thought me a ghost, however; that was plain, or he would have shot at me."

"But what, in Heaven's name, are we to do now? If those yells of his were heard in the town, and we intercepted now, and captured, they'd lynch us sure, for the killing of those two scoundrels!"

"It will be said, of course, that I came with Darington—for none will believe me to be anybody but Black—that I came with Darington to influence him to sell his share of the Flush Hand Mine, and induced him to have the money sent from Denver on purpose. The plot will seem but too evident."

"They will reason that Saunders and Brooks followed us, to warn Darington, and that I killed them, having hired you to assist. We may make up our minds they will do just that, if Darington is not found, and Billy Black keeps hid. And that the double-dyed villain will be sure to do, if he sees matters as I have just explained them, when he becomes a trifle cooler and more collected, and gets to reasoning upon the occurrences, now so startling, strange, terrific, and unaccountable to him."

"He may remain in hiding, and steal into the town in disguise; there ascertaining the truth—namely, that he was beaten at his own game,

and caused to be the executioner of his miserable confederates in crime."

The Indian comprehended the drift of these words, spoken excitedly though they were by Mountain Misery, and in his most rapid manner; and he could not help being struck by the complicated state of affairs, and the possible, if not probable, danger that hovered over himself and his white brother, merely on account of the exertions they had made to prevent an innocent man from being robbed and murdered.

CHAPTER XI.

MISERY AND MYSTERY.

MOUNTAIN MISERY and Ugalala, the Ute, were, indeed, in a very peculiar, perplexing, and dangerous position.

Matters looked dark to them.

The morning would come, and Pocketville would be in a frenzy of excitement; perhaps, indeed, before that time. For the horses that escaped would undoubtedly find their way back to the stable, and the frightened hostler would be forced to tell all he knew.

Then Saunders and Brooks would be missed.

Darlington and Black might have stolen away without informing Crystal Charley.

All this would be suspicious, and the trail would be searched for, and followed.

That would lead to the finding of the bodies, and, Darlington and Black not returning, it would be believed that they too had been murdered, and thrown into some old shaft.

But if he, Mountain Misery, should be captured, he would be thought to be Black, without a doubt.

Those who knew him would swear he had put on "States" clothes, enticed Darlington from Denver, by letter, and then, when his money had arrived by express, had killed and robbed him.

From the fact that Darlington and Black had been at the office of Saunders and Brooks—evidently on business—they would reason that the said firm had held suspicions in regard to the object of Black; that they had followed the pair, to warn Darlington, and had been knocked down senseless in the darkness, bound, and thrown into the gulch.

Thus reflected Mountain Misery.

He well knew that the half-drunken men of Pocketville would listen to no explanations, unless backed by the plainest and strongest proofs.

Even were he to assume his usual attire, and should be found at his hut, the miners would believe him to be the man who had registered at Red-Eye Roost as "William Black, Denver, Colorado."

Unless Darlington was found, and that soon, Mountain Misery realized that he was in a bad box. He was fairly appalled.

It seemed that, through Black, he was really to meet an ignominious death; yet, not even for an instant, did he think of flight. He had found himself greatly interested in this stranger, Darlington; for the reason that the latter had so nearly become the victim of Bill Black, and that in much the same manner as he himself had in the past.

He had long hated Black, and had oft vowed to have his life.

And he was still as determined in this.

He resolved to seek the miscreant high and low, as far as he could do so without periling his own safety. But he was strongly impressed that to venture into Pocketville would be to court his own doom by the rope.

As these thoughts flashed through the mind of Bentley Bowen, there beneath the shades of the cedars, Ugalala standing silent in front of him—the savage striving instinctively to catch any suspicious sound—as the recluse stood thus, he noticed the absence of the hat and blanket of his red friend, the moon now being well up in the heavens.

"Where are your blanket and hat, Ugalala?" asked Mountain Misery.

The Indian explained.

The hermit fairly groaned as he comprehended the facts.

"You, too, Ugalala? That will fasten suspicion upon you also," he said, quickly.

"They will say you placed the articles thus, to cause the men in the bar to believe you to be sleeping there on the bench; this giving you opportunity to steal out into the night for some questionable purpose. Most certainly they will come to the conclusion that you had a strong object in so doing; and when the dead are discovered, and the fact that the two strangers are missing, all this will be connected with the crime."

"As matters now stand, we are both outlaws. The men of Pocketville will hang us both if they

catch us, and that because we have sacrificed our time and comfort in the attempt to save a perfect stranger. It is rough, but it can't be helped now, I'm afraid."

"Let us search thoroughly for Darlington—that is our only hope. There has been no alarm in the town as yet. They have been carousing, and have not heard the shrieks of Bill Black."

"Waugh!" was all that came from the red-man's lips; but the sound indicated disgust and baffled rage.

The Indian evidently understood the gist of the explanations made by his white pard; and, although somewhat mixed, decided that the world was whirling the wrong way that night.

The pair searched carefully on the east side of the mountain-spur, and then passed around the trail together; both being seen, as the reader already knows, by poor Darlington as he crouched in his retreat among the rocks.

Again he heard and saw, by peeping out, in the greatest consternation, one whom he would have taken his oath was Bill Black—the same man whom he had previously beheld standing there, but this time accompanied by the Indian he had seen before among the rocks.

So demoralized was Darlington by the awful occurrences of the night that he then decided at once his imagination must have been at fault—he could not have seen Black speeding past on horseback.

He now believed his partner to be in league with a hostile Indian; and all the warnings he had had from friends, and the suspicions expressed by his son and daughter, were recalled to mind; causing mistrust and rank suspicion where none had previously existed.

Could it be that William Black had lured him to Pocketville to rob and murder him?

Had his life been saved by that stranger who had jerked him from his saddle?

He now recalled, as in a dream, the fact that the person who had used him so harshly had whispered in his ear, bidding him lie perfectly still, as his life depended upon it.

Yet he had heard the sound of deadly blows, the voice of Black, and the shrieks of a man, apparently in mortal fright.

He now blamed himself very much for having betrayed such weakness and fear. Had he sprung to his feet, which he might have done, he would have been able to witness the conflict, dark though it was.

But Darlington could make nothing out of his ponderings.

He was completely muddled.

But so strong were his suspicions and distrust of Black, by this time, that he, although so sadly situated, feared to reveal himself.

Much of misery to himself and others would have been avoided had he done so.

The Indian, with Mountain Misery, passed from his view.

They had decided to follow the trail of Black, as Darlington was not to be found; and, if they lost the same, to return to the mountain hut for food and sleep, to brace themselves for possible trials to come.

As for poor Darlington, after the pair had disappeared, he was in a fearful state of terror and apprehension.

He felt that he was alone on the mountain, and far worse than alone; for some unaccountable instinct caused him to be confident that the dead were not far from him—that he was near where lay the forms of murdered men!

And although he felt assured of this, and the thought filled him with chilling horror, still he felt an irresistible power drawing him toward the scene of the tragedy. He was ruled by the fascination of repulsion and terror.

Although his eyes fairly started from his head, in a wild and wandering stare, and his face was ghastly—he trembling at the very slightest scrape made by his own boot upon the rocks—yet he climbed back the way he had come, over the spur, and down the rough way into the cedars again.

The moon's rays lit up the scene, which had been in darkness when he first rode up the trail. He knew the exact spot where he had been so unceremoniously dragged from his horse, and he calculated in his mind the point at which he had heard the hard trampling of the horses' feet, and the cruel blow, which, he felt sure, had descended on the skull of some one more unfortunate than himself.

Stealthily Darlington walked over the shelf, detecting in the moonlight the signs where the iron-shod hoofs had ground and chipped off portions of the rock.

This "sign" he followed, but very slowly, and with horrible anticipation, to the very verge of the shelf. Then an ejaculation, wild

and strange, burst from him, as he saw plainly several splashes of blood.

He was then certain that some person or persons had been knocked from their saddles, and had fallen over into the gulch.

He got upon his hands and knees and crawled to the brink.

It was an awful, a tremendous chasm!

Of course he could not expect to see the base, or to distinguish anything that was there; yet he fixed his gaze downward, and leaned further, until his head projected over.

A moment more, and a hollow groan struck his ears from below, and he beheld the forms of two men lying upon a narrow portion of rock that projected from the wall of the gulch. He could even detect blood upon them. He had heard a groan, but no motion was made by either of them.

David Darlington began to think that he had been deceived—that he was not gazing upon two corpses after all.

The face of one was upturned to the moon, and the spell-bound gazer believed he had somewhere seen that countenance, and but recently, yet he could not locate it.

In fact, he did not stop to do so, for, after standing for some moments in horror and dread, he sprung to his feet, and ran as though the dead were ferociously following him, along the shelf; proceeding at great speed the same way in which Black first and Mountain Misery last had gone.

For a long distance Darlington thus dashed wildly; at times climbing up steep, and then descending until, entirely exhausted, he at length crawled into a cave-like opening, and fell, almost senseless, upon the ground.

There lay David Darlington, a deathlike sleep upon him, the sleep of prostration.

And Bentley Bowen, with Ugalala, both utterly discouraged and greatly fatigued, made their way, by a long and tedious course, to the hut of the former; here, after breaking their fast, they rolled themselves in their blankets, and ere long were in deep slumber—free, for the time, from apprehension in regard to their safety, and their disappointment at not having discovered the slightest trace of either Darlington or Bill Black.

CHAPTER XII.

DASH DARE.

DAVID DARLINGTON had wished, when on the road to Pocketville, that he had permitted his young son, Dashiell, to accompany him, as the latter had almost insisted upon doing.

The youth and his sister had, as we have mentioned, always disliked and distrusted the Black brothers, John and William.

After the departure of their father, Dash and Della became greatly worried, for Mr. Darlington had been absent from his home but little, and they could not help fearing, that in the wild region to which he was bound, he would, in some manner, come to harm.

Nor could they disabuse their minds from suspicion, as to the object of Bill Black.

They knew that these mysterious brothers were well acquainted in the mining regions down the range, and it was far from being impossible that they had been connected with outlaws, or mine-swindlers.

Such thoughts made the brother and sister not a little anxious, and it was not long after his father had set out that the former resolved to have an interview with John Black. But he gained little information from John; indeed, that individual soon left the inner office, evidently irritated by the questionings of Dash Darlington.

The young man sat for a time in deep thought, gazing at the floor.

He was seated near a large desk beneath which was a litter of papers.

Suddenly, raising his eyes, they fell upon an envelope that had been opened, and evidently dropped there by accident, as no other letters were there. Had not the address and the name of the post-office been remarkably legible, Dashiell would have taken no further notice of it.

As it was, he cast a glance furtively through the glass door, and seeing he was not observed, he quickly secured the letter, and thrust it into his pocket. He then walked away carelessly from the store.

But, when he gained the street, he increased his pace to a fast walk; turning a corner hastily, he examined the envelope more closely.

To his surprise, there was a thin slip of paper inside; the letter itself having been taken out, while this had remained undiscovered.

This Dash quickly perused, and a vengeful

light shot from his blue eyes, while his fingers closed fiercely upon the tell-tale piece of paper. He rushed home, like one on a desperate mission, and darting into the house, sought his sister.

Seeing her brother's excitement, the young girl arose, in some surprise, from her chair.

"Della," he exclaimed, "I greatly fear that our suspicions were but too well founded! Indeed, I have little doubt of it. Hear this.

"I found this envelope in the Blacks' office, and the slip of paper within has been undoubtedly overlooked.

With pale face, and with an impressive voice, the young man then read:

"POCKETVILLE.

"PARD JOHN:—Have written Bill, but will say the same to you, for fear of his letter being miscarried. Bring the old man on at once if the game can be worked. Must close up soon, for the men know the dust doesn't pay for their labor.

"If the old fool bites the Placertown biz, we'll rake his pile. Remember all travelers hereabouts are liable to accidents. S. & B."

"Now, Della, do you understand that?"

His sister was speechless. She caught at a chair for support.

Dashiell continued:

"It means that those Black brothers are villains! They cajoled father into that partnership to defraud him, and you see they have confederates in Pocketville. The scoundrels who wrote that they wished to purchase his share of the Flush Hand Mine are leagued with the Blacks.

"But, what does it mean? I cannot understand why they should offer \$50,000 for father's share. By Heavens, I have it! The offer was a bait to draw him into a trap. They will rob him of that fifty thousand he has sent by express, to purchase an interest in those Placertown mines!

"Della, I must start at once. It may not be too late. I'll ride like the wind. But are you safe here? Poor uncle Dudley is poor defense for you, or even company.

"You must get some friend, some girl chum, to remain with you, and John Black must not be allowed to enter the house. He has remained in Denver for no good. However, we cannot proceed against him. We have no positive proof, but if everything is as I suspect and fear, woe be to the Black brothers!"

"Oh, Dash!" said his sister; "I have been more worried than I have admitted. I have been confident that William Black had a villainous object in inducing father to go out to those mines. But you may have no fear for me. I can take care of myself. You may be sure I shall hold no communication with John Black."

"All right then, Della! Only don't be apprehensive in regard to me. You know I am accustomed to the saddle, and to roughing it. I know the mountains, and the ways of mountaineers; and besides I have naturally the talents of a detective, and am a crack shot. I'll get father out all right, so you can trust me, and don't worry.

"I'll get ready at once, but bear in mind that John Black must know nothing of my trip to Pocketville. Contrive to have him believe me off on a short hunt. That will be nothing unusual. Come to think of it, I'll so inform every one I see, so he'll be certain to hear of it.

"Cheer up, sis! I'll succeed, I'm sure, for I feel it in my bones. I'll see you again before I start."

Dash Darrington left the room.

In half an hour he returned, habited in an entire suit of buckskin, fringed and embroidered, besides thickly bedecked with silver buttons. A soft slouch hat, with wide brim, was worn jauntily on his head, his hair, wavy and almost golden, hanging low over his shoulders.

He wore a belt of the usual arms of the frontier, revolvers and bowie of fine workmanship; the handles covered with silver ornaments. His breeches were thrust into high-topped boots, of costly leather and make.

Altogether the young man presented a handsome picture, though seemingly almost too feminine to "rough it," did not one observe the flash of his eyes, and the determination, strength and daring so strongly indicated by the formation of his chin, and the poise of his form and entire bearing.

His sister was almost overcome at the thought of his leaving, and the dangers he might have to encounter—dangers which even then might surround their father.

"Don't, Della!" said the young man. "You'll unfit me for my mission. Be brave now, and wish me God-speed, for I must go. Every minute is of importance—think of that."

By a great effort the young girl complied, as-

suring her brother that she would be hopeful and patient.

The youth then tore himself away.

By side streets, avoiding as much as possible every thoroughfare in which he would be known and noticed, Dash Darrington rode from Denver, and when clear of the town drove spurs, and sped on his mission of love and, as he suspected, revenge.

Thus it happened that Dash Dare, as his young pards called him, arrived in the vicinity of Pocketville at the very time the tragic occurrences we have recorded were coming off on the rocky shelf up the side of the mountain range.

In fact he was riding among the foothills, having struck across country and missed the stage trail in the darkness.

He felt confident that he was near the town, and knew it was at the base of the range. His horse was fagged, and Dash himself was quite fatigued and hungry, for his ride had been long and rapid.

He had calculated, knowing the time the bankers had sent the money to his father by express, that the same would not arrive in Pocketville until that very night after dark.

This caused him to conclude that he would be in time—that there would be no business transacted until the following day.

Had not Bill Black changed his plans, as we have seen, young Darrington would have arrived before the sale of the "Flush Hand Mine," and thus would probably have prevented the death of Saunders and Brooks through his interference, for he was not one to be thwarted or frightened, being just the opposite of his poor father in many ways.

But, to return.

Dash was proceeding at an easy trot along the base of the range, having nearly reached a point directly below the spur of the mountains, where the tragedy of the night before was enacted, and just before the advent of his father at the clump of cedars.

As the reader knows, it was dark, forms being but indistinctly seen and almost impossible to distinguish. Dash Dare had no little trouble amid the scattered boulders in guiding his horse, which was unaccustomed to such a locality. Above him the peaks and irregularities in the range were outlined against the sky.

Thus was our young friend situated when a piercing shriek from overhead caused him to jerk his horse to a halt and sit in suspense and not without apprehension. He gazed upward, his eyes seeming to pierce the darkness.

Thus he sat, as if transformed into stone, until the moon's disk cleared the bank of clouds.

Then he saw a sight that fairly appalled him, filling him with superstitious wonder, and almost chilling his blood.

Could he believe his eyes?

Tearing open his saddle-bags, Dashiell Darrington drew forth a powerful night-glass, quickly placing it to his eyes.

A suppressed cry broke from him.

High up on the rocky shelf he beheld two men, both alike in form, stature, features and dress—two Bill Blacks!

For a moment only Dash saw this tableau. Then one of the men sprang upon a horse and sped along the shelf, shrieking like a maniac.

As the horseman shot around the spur Dash Dare gazed toward the point at which the other man had stood; but he was gone—vanished!

The youth was thunderstruck.

He could hardly persuade himself that it had not been an optical delusion.

Had not it been because his mind had been so occupied with thoughts of Black that this vision had been conjured up in his imagination? This seemed reasonable.

Still Dash maintained his position.

It was not long ere he had proof that his eyes had not played him false; for one of the figures had reappeared from the shades and ran along the shelf and around the spur of rock, apparently in pursuit of the horseman.

Then, outlined against the sky, on the very summit of the spur, Dash beheld another figure, which it almost took his breath away to discover.

Only for a moment or two was this plainly seen, and then over it went, but apparently to cut off the previous fugitive.

Dash Darrington recognized this last man as his father.

He was now unable either to speak or move.

Then, another apparition occupied the same spot, and the young man saw that this was an Indian, with long hair wildly flowing. A groan burst from Dashiell's lips.

He was more than dumfounded.

What meant these strange scenes?

He looked again.

The Indian had vanished!

Not a living, moving object was to be seen. Nothing but a wild, somber, rugged view now met the eyes of Dash Dare.

Had there ever been more?

It seemed impossible that he could have beheld the scenes which were so deeply imprinted upon his mind.

What should he do?

Afar up towered the rough rock of the gulch, inaccessible from below.

No possible way was there to reach the shelf, some two hundred feet above. A circuit of miles must perhaps be traveled before he could gain it.

Should he yell?

No. That would do no good.

Having witnessed what he did, he might be able to accomplish something in assisting his father by remaining silent and undiscovered.

Strange emotions seemed to rule him. A fascination, which he could not resist, chained him to the spot; his eyes fastened upon what appeared to be but a fine line upon the wall of the gulch.

Thus he remained, until the red-man and who seemed to be William Black returned around the spur of the sub-ridge, both disappearing in the cedars. In a little while they emerged, both going round the spur together.

This was startling to Dash, for it proved that Black, or the man whom he believed to be Black, was in league with the savage. What could these movements mean?

Were they searching for his father?

So it seemed, for the latter soon came over the ridge, and clambered down its side into the cedar thicket.

Dash Dare was enduring torture.

Should Black and the Indian return, they would find his father, and would undoubtedly slay him! He had no doubt that this was their object.

The suspense was terrible.

Soon it became even more so, for his father stole toward the open space on the shelf; and, dropping on his knees, gazed over the brink. It seemed to Dash as though he must fall into the chasm.

What was David Darrington gazing at?

Not at himself, but directly below.

Dash knew that he could not be seen from above, amid the cedars and boulders.

The gaze of the father directed that of the son, who now perceived a slight break in the rock wall of the gulch.

Dash Dare leveled his glass, and an ejaculation of horror escaped him, for the white face and hands of a man, with stains of blood upon them, were dimly revealed, but so plain as not to be mistaken.

"Merciful Heavens! What has occurred, and what means that strange sight? I shall go insane if this continues."

Thus whispered Dash to himself.

Now, more than ever before, he felt that he must remain silent.

If he yelled to his father, the sound might, undoubtedly would, draw the Indian and Black to the point; and thus he would be the means of betraying his father, and dooming him to death before his eyes.

Young Darrington heaved a sigh of relief, when his father arose and staggered away.

But, when he saw him disappear around the spur, the same way in which Black and the savage had gone, he became almost frenzied; and spurring deep, he forced his steed down the range, in an agony of anxiety, bordering on despair. As he thus dashed on, he scanned the mountain-side for a possible way up to the shelf.

Thus on sped Dashiell Darrington toward Pocketville.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHICO GIANT.

THE frequenters of Red-Eye Roost had been more hilarious than usual on the night of which we have been speaking.

There was good reason for this, as Brooks of the "Flush Hand" had paid off all the miners who worked for the firm, and the men had left the shaft at an earlier hour than usual. Besides this, they had all been discharged.

In such a case, one might naturally suppose that they would hold on to their money.

It was just the opposite, however; for they seemed to vie with each other in ordering up the "general irrigates," and even disputing in regard to their turns to treat.

Crystal Charley had all he could attend to.

Things were in this condition when the stage arrived; a perfect din being the order of the evening, and which so frightened Darington, when he was awakened by Black, in order that he might get his package of money from the express agent.

The miners knew that the "Flush Hand" was kept going by money furnished the firm by a silent partner in Denver; and when they saw William Black and heard that he and a pard, who had arrived with him that afternoon, had been to the office of Saunders and Brooks, many of them believed that the silent partner had come, and their hope was, that he would open shaft in Pocketville.

It was rumored that he was as rich as Rothschild, but no one knew which of the two men whose names were on the hotel register was the man.

When, however, it was reported that a large amount of money had arrived by express for David Darington, all believed him to be the moneyed man of the "Flush Hand."

Consequently Darington became an important personage in the estimation of all; but they had no opportunity to manifest their feelings, as Black contrived to get his companion out, to close the business at the office with Saunders and Brooks, without being observed by any in the crowd.

Soon the "silent partner" was forgotten, in the arrival of just such a personage as would be the most welcome in such a place.

He galloped up at full speed, halting not until his horse was made to bound upon the low porch, and stand upon the very threshold of the door of Red-Eye Roost.

"Howdy, boyees? Hyer I am, hot an' healthy; an' precious thirsty, too—dang my boots, spurs an' all, ef I ain't!

"I'm right on ther whoop-up, whoop-er-ee-o, Cache Carl o' Chico! Glad ter make yer 'quaint', pards o' Pocketville. I'll see yer all in a hop an' skip."

A yell at the door had signaled something that was fresh, and welcome to the crowd inside; consequently, the room became silent, and all eyes were fixed upon the new arrival, a smile being on every face as the words were spoken by the stranger—his open, boyish, good-natured face being sufficient to insure him a welcome in any crowd.

All seemed convinced that their anticipated good time would be a livelier racket, on account of the arrival of the genial-looking lad, who was, notwithstanding, almost a giant in stature.

He was clad in a flaming red flannel shirt, the collar wide and sailor-like, and thrown over the shoulders; buckskin breeches, held tight at the waist by a bright blue silk sash, and also a wide belt that sustained a pair of revolvers and a huge bowie. He wore high-topped serviceable boots, and a huge sombrero of Mexican make, the brim in front being pushed upward, displaying a broad, sunburned brow.

This filled out the "make-up" of Cache Carl of Chico, as he announced himself.

No sooner had man and horse disappeared from the door, on the way around the corner of the hostelry to the stable, than one of the miners yelled:

"Three cheers fer Cache Carl o' Chico!"

The very building trembled, as the strong-lunged men gave those hurrahs, bounding upward at each, and swinging hats in air.

None thought of drinking again until the stranger put in his appearance.

All seemed delighted at the prospects for a gay old time.

"He's a slam-up pilgrim!"

"Pure an' underluted!"

"XXX, an' don't yer fergit it!"

"Chalk him down a cherub!"

"He's a tart with a full crust!"

"Pure pewter. No need ter assay his sort."

"Happy an' innercent as a suckin' pappoose!"

"Ain't he jist gay an' festiferous?"

These and like expressions were heard on all sides from the crowd.

Even many of the gamblers at the tables got their checks cashed, and hastened to ascertain what it was that had occasioned the excitement. A compact crowd formed, from a point midway of the bar counter, and back beyond the end of the same, all facing toward the front entrance of the hotel.

To the right of him as he entered was a window, which was inside the counter, enabling Crystal Charley to see out upon the street at will. This window was wide open, as the crowd caused the atmosphere within to be close.

Every eye was turned expectantly to the open door, in anticipation of the entrance of Cache Carl.

Soon he did enter, but not through the door. He shot through the window, landing upon the bar counter, his huge form actually looming up to the rough joists above.

There he stood, his sombrero being removed as he landed, his arms extended downward and away from his form, and his hands open.

The crowd were quite startled at his "Jack-in-the-box" advent, but this was only momentary, as was the silence of the giant.

"Jist flittin' in outen ther fog, folkses! I said I'd see yer later. Hyer I am ag'in, an' jist es bloomin'. Pass out ther p'ison fer ther hull party o' pilgrims, pard!"

Thus spoke Cache Carl.

As he ended, some one yelled:

"Welcome ter Pocketville, Cache Carl, ther Caverleer o' Colorado! Hyer's jist ther place fer yer ter dart in outen ther dew."

The cheers and whoops that followed were deafening. Crystal Charley grasped the hand of the young Hercules, crying out:

"Heard of you, Cache, and just no end glad you have dropped in on us!"

The barkeeper then set out a dozen decanters, and spun the glasses dexterously all along the bar.

Taking from his pouch a gold coin, Cache Carl snapped the same in a peculiar manner, and it spun through the air, describing an arch, and falling flat, with a rich ring, on the counter just in front of Crystal Charley.

It was a "slug," or fifty dollar gold piece, octagonal in form.

There was another cheer.

The Chico giant then poured out his liquor—a huge goblet having been placed before him as a joke, by Charley.

Carl gave the same smile.

Enough to make some men drunk, he poured into the goblet, and still standing upon the counter, raised it up, and viewed the liquor before the light, saying:

"Hit's a cold day in Colorado, boyees, when I can't cache a big drink o' comfort. Hyer's to my pards o' Pocketville!"

Another loud cheer, and then all drank.

"Try it on again," said the new-comer, with a wave of the hand to Charley.

But a loud murmur arose at this.

"Don't go fer ter insult we-uns!"

"Cache, we're 'bout half-white."

"Chico fu'st, Pocketville arter!"

"Don't paste it outen us!"

"Hit's my order up this deal,"

"Mine! Mine!" yelled many others.

The face of Cache Carl changed instantly in expression.

He smiled no longer.

His visage became as furious as that of a mad-dened lion, and he whipped out both revolvers, after smashing his sombrero upon his head.

"Pilgrims o' Pocketville!" he yelled; "I sorter sashayed up-range, easy like, calkerlatin' ter perceed ter Placertown, but I struck ther stage-trail, an' darted in outen the dew hyer, fer ter brace up, an' smile at yer."

"Sides that, I war hopin' ter ram ag'in' a copper-skinned cuss, what hes a white heart, in this burg o' yours. I heard yer cog'd him Red-Eye."

"Now hit 'pears yer doesn't jist know me. I tole yer I war Cache Carl o' Chico. When yer bucks ag'in' my habits, I gits riled. I asser-vates we drinks ther hull vally o' my money right now, er I'll shoot every galoot in Pocketville outen his boots! Yer needn't think I hain't gut ammerish 'nough ter do hit, fer I hev."

The giant gazed around at the uplifted faces, his revolvers pointed, the hammers up, and his fingers on the triggers.

Extreme astonishment was stamped upon every face, the change had been so startling. But just as rapidly did he change back, in the expression of his face; for he burst into uproarious laughter, as he sat down, Turk fashion, on the bar.

He then replaced his pistols, and proceeded to pour out another glass of whisky.

Crystal Charley laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks.

The crowd gazed open-mouthed at the giant for a moment, and then the whole room resounded with laughter. None cared to break in upon the habits of Cache Carl after that.

His manner and humor were too comical and original to interfere with by raising a row through objecting to again drinking with him, and all drank.

Then there was a commotion in the rear of the crowd.

"Stand aside all!" was the yelled order, and it was at once obeyed.

The crowd parted, and two miners passed

through; each holding one end of a bench, upon which lay a human form.

The bench was placed upon the bar.

The motionless figure upon it was covered with the blanket and the face with the battered plug hat of Ugalala. All thought the Indian must be dead, since he had not been awakened by the din.

A hush fell upon the crowd.

"Thar's Red-Eye, Cache Carl," said one of the miners, at length. "He's ther cuss yer wanted ter see. He's chin-up full o' p'ison now, I reckon, by ther looks o' him."

Relief and satisfaction were plainly visible on Cache Carl's face, as he heard these words, and saw the form on the bench.

He sprang up, and threw off the blanket and hat.

A cry of astonishment came from the crowd.

The face thus exposed was that of a white man—oh, so white! indeed ghastly!

They recognized him as a man of education and gentlemanly manners, who had arrived at the town a month previous and had been drinking continually, night and day, when not asleep.

But he would drink no more.

Cache Carl laid his hand on the face, and then on the heart.

The former was icy cold, the latter was stilled forever!

"Pards o' Pocketville," he asked, "what does this hyer mean? Ther man's dead! How kim them duds o' Red-Eye enter him?"

All had supposed the form to be that of the sleeping Indian.

No one could offer any explanation.

Some, however, asserted that Red-Eye had been there several times during the day and evening, and last but a short time previous to the arrival of the stage.

Cache Carl gazed from one to another, but he saw no man's face that betrayed anything but truth in this connection. He was satisfied that no one present knew the whereabouts of his red friend.

It was strange, puzzling to all, why the Indian had left his hat and blanket in such a way. It was certain he could not have known that the man was dead.

And, just as certain was it, that Ugalala must have placed his blanket and hat thus, to cause those in the room to think it was himself there sleeping.

But, why had he done it?

Not a soul present could recall a single "crooked" act of the Indian's doing.

Yet, things looked suspicious.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL HANDS ON THE TRAIL.

UPON the bar lay a wretched victim of the vile poison he had so often swallowed there. Many present had reasoned and expostulated with him, even when they themselves had drank much more than he did, but they knew that he was feeble, and that all hope and all desire for life had left him.

His troubles were now over.

The jollification was checked; all feeling regret on account of the sad end of the inoffensive and friendless stranger.

Had one of their number been shot in his boots in that very room, the event would not have interfered with the general enjoyment.

But this was different.

Nothing explanatory was said to Cache Carl about the dead man; but this was unnecessary, for everything spoke of his respectable antecedents. There was no bloat of flesh, no blotch of skin. White, smooth, and thin as he was, whisky had done its work entirely upon his vitals.

The Chico giant sprang to the floor, and took up the corpse in his arms.

"Charley," he said to the barkeeper, "let me lay the poor feller outen a bed. This ain't no place fer him."

The crowd looked on in silence.

Crystal Charley led the way up-stairs, carrying a candle. As they passed the doors of the late arrivals, Charley noticed that they were both partly open.

This surprised him, but he led the way to a vacant room, and the corpse was laid upon the bed, Cache Carl remarking:

"Thet's all we kin do fer him ter-night, poor pilgrim. Over ther range, an' let's hope out o' misery."

They passed out and locked the door.

Crystal Charley had another matter to disturb him. He knew that Darington had received a large sum by express—the amount was known to him and the agent of the company—and, from this fact, it was, he felt, simply insane for him

to have left his door unlocked. The barkeeper had been favorably impressed by Darington, and the opposite by Black.

He touched Carl on the shoulder.

"Hold on a minute, pard," he said; "I want you to look into two rooms with me. I will explain later. Here we are!"

As he spoke, Charley pushed Darington's door open, and held the candle so as to throw the light inside.

"I'll be blanked!" burst from the barkeeper, in a strange manner.

The bed was tumbled, but the little apartment was empty. He sprang to the other door. Black's room was also vacant.

"Worse, and more of it!" exclaimed Crystal Charley.

Both consternation and alarm were in his face. Cache Carl simply asked:

"Wa-al, what's wrong hyer?"

"There's a good bit wrong, pard. I've heard you were death on catching crooked cusses. The man who occupied that room received \$50,000 by express, on the stage to-night. His name is David Darington. He came here with the one who occupied the other apartment.

"They have gone without notifying me—indeed, they were to have remained two days. The other party registered as William Black—both of Denver. I distrusted Black at sight, but Darington was O. K., I am sure, and greatly out of his element here.

"There has been foul play, Carl. The Indian is missing also, and has left his traps, as you saw; evidently with the view of making every one believe he was on that bench asleep. All this is suspicious, and I want you to help me out of it.

"These parties visited the office of Saunders and Brooks, owners of the 'Flush Hand,' when they came, and also before retiring. The mine is closed for good, and the men paid off and discharged. Now, what in the dickens does it all mean?"

The expression of Cache Carl's face changed slightly when the names of Brooks and Saunders were mentioned; and also at that of Black. But Crystal Charley did not perceive this.

"I reckon," remarked Carl, "that the first spurt hed orter be ter that office. Thar's no use ter move in sich a game without ther hull crowd. Ef that cuss Black hev killed his pard, he orter be lynched.

"Now, I'll just open on 'em, ef yer say so; but thar ain't much show by night time. Hedn't I better tell ther boyees ther hull biz? But, no; I reckon I'll wait till we sees Saunders and Brooks."

"That would be more advisable, I think; but you know best how to work the racket. By thunder! if Black has wiped Darington out, I'd like to jerk a rope on him myself."

The pair passed down-stairs, Charley going behind the bar, and Cache Carl jumping upon it as before.

The murmur of voices ceased.

"Pilgrims o' Pocketville," began the Chicoman presently, "I hes onexpectedly gut a leetle vestergation job on hand. I'll 'splain all when we-uns 'roves back hyer. I wants yer all ter foller me ter the office o' Saunders and Brooks. Come on!"

The miners were greatly astonished.

They conversed in groups.

"Lead on, Cache Carl! We're arter yer like coyotes arter a wounded buffler," shouted one of the crowd.

Carl started for the door, and the mob set out to follow; but the rapid clatter of hoofs caused them to halt. Crystal Charley had sprung to the window, and he made a gesture for them to delay, as he could see the horseman in the moonlight.

There was no halt at the door, only a slight decrease of speed, and man and horse shot into the bar-room.

The rider was Dash Dare!

His eyes were blazing and his face showed his concern and suspense.

Right in front of the young giant he halted, doffing his sombrero in salutation. Then he cried out in clear tones:

"Men of Pocketville, my name is Dashiell Darington. I came from Denver in search of my father, David Darington. He traveled this way with a scoundrel named Bill Black. I now call on every square man to follow me!

"I have seen strange sights to-night, by moonlight, up the side of the range. A half-mile from here is a shelf which runs around the side and up the range. In the way that I have come there is no way to reach it. Will some one guide me and all follow?"

"My father is perhaps now dead, although I

saw him alive at a distance. I saw Black in company with an Indian. There has been murder on the mountains, and I have seen the bodies of the slain.

"I am wild for revenge. I'll save my father or die!"

The crowd stood open-mouthed.

Cache Carl was an exception.

Pouring out some brandy he passed it to Dash Dare, whose lips were parched and his eyes glassy.

"Drink that!" he said. "We-uns is with yer!"

Then he turned to the miners.

"Come on, boyees! We'll salervate ther crooked cuss. Somebody lead ter ther trail."

A yell burst from the crowd and a dozen men dashed out on the instant.

"Yer better leave yer nag, pard," advised the Chico giant. "Ther rocks is rough, an' yer kin git along on yer legs better."

Without a word the youth sprang to the ground as they passed through the stable-yard, and slipping the bridle from the horse's head hung it on the saddle-horn, allowing the animal to go loose. Two other steeds were running wildly about the yard, another proof that some wrong-doing was in progress.

But no halt was made.

They rushed in a body to the trail that led to the old shaft, and up the same in silence.

As soon as the trail was gained Cache Carl and Dash Dare bounded past the leaders to the front, the young giant holding one of Dash's hands, who appeared in comparison a mere child. Thus on they went until the cedar clump was reached, and Dash then recognized the spur of rock beyond.

He sprang free from Carl and stood pointing downward, significantly.

The crowd came up, breathing hard.

Below, on a projection of rock, lay the bodies of Brooks and Saunders.

All identified the face of Brooks as the moon shone full on the ghastly and blood-stained features. A low roar of threatening expression sounded on the shelf.

"Keep cool, pards," advised Cache Carl. "We-uns doesn't keer ter gi'n ourselves away. Ef ther cuss air nigh we-uns mustn't gi'n him notice we're on the track.

"Come hyer, some on yer," he continued, "an' let me down! We-uns must take a look et ther corpses. This hyer thing air gittin' mixed. Leetle pard, whar did yer git a peep et yer dad?"

"Here and on the ridge of the spur yonder."

As he pointed, he darted to the shades of cedars and began examining the ground.

To say that the miners were astonished at beholding Brooks and another man, apparently dead, upon the rock below, would be putting it mild. Especially was this the case when they discovered that the arms of the men below were bound, and that a saddle was attached to one of them.

When the pair were drawn up and laid side by side, and were seen to be the owners of the "Flush-Hand Mine," then all were completely dumfounded.

Cache Carl quickly made an examination of the bruised bodies.

"This pilgrim ain't dead, but he's ormighty nigh it," said he, designating Saunders. "He'll flop over ther range dang'd easy. Brooks air es dead es a door-nail.

"Some on yer tote 'em back ter ther burg. Now ter biz. Whar's ther leetle chick from Denver?"

"Thar he bees," said one, pointing upward.

Dash Dare was on the ridge of the spur of rocks, his form outlined against the sky.

He held a small object upward, swinging it in his hand, but soon sprang from rock to rock to join the crowd.

He hastened to Carl, who stepped forward to meet him.

"Will these unravel the mystery?" inquired Dash, excitedly. "Look! That gag has been used to-night."

"Saunders and Brooks are both gagged, too," was the reply. "Thet makes things deeper. Thar's bin more'n two, 'sides ther cadavers, mixed in this hyer biz."

"And here is a package with my father's name on it. I'll untie it in your presence, and we'll examine it."

This was found to contain several Government bonds of large denominations. There was also a receipt for fifty thousand dollars, received by David Darington from Saunders and Brooks, in payment for his one-third of the mine.

"How is thet, when they know'd ther thing had petered out?"

Thus inquired one of the miners.

"Thet's what makes hit more'n a mystery, ef ther Flush Hand air bu'sted," said Cache Carl.

"I can explain that," said young Darington, quickly. "Those men are murdered, and they deserved to be. I know they were in league with Black, and it was they who instructed him to bring my father here. They had been working that mine for an object, on money my father had put into it, believing they had invested a like amount. The purchasing his share, and the payment of that money, was but a bait to draw him into a trap.

"The design was to get him here, and have him order \$50,000 to be sent him to purchase shares in mines at Placertown.

"Men of Pocketville, that money is counterfeit! They were playing to get the fifty thousand that came by express. In what manner they got balked, two of them losing their lives, we have yet to find out.

"Let us search for my father. I know that I saw him, and this package is a proof that I did so. I saw also Black and an Indian."

Dash Dare did not mention that he had seen two men both seeming to be Bill Black, for he knew that his whole story would be open to doubt if he did.

"An' I'm bettin' high ther red helped yer dad," remarked the giant.

"Then why was he with Black, and not with my father?"

"Dang ef I know! Mebbe ye war too fluster-cated ter see straight."

"Indeed I was not! But time is precious. I must begin my search, and I'll shoot that Black on sight, by Heavens!"

"Save ther cuss fer ther rope," advised Cache Carl, in a loud voice. "If we find ther Red, I'm dead sure we'll know ther hull biz.

"Spread out, boyees, an' don't miss a hole!"

CHAPTER XV.

FATHER AND SON.

AFTER the order of Cache Carl, to start on the search, eight of the miners formed litters of branches, and bore the two battered bodies down the trail, to the town, while the others began exploring.

Some found a trail leading into the old shaft; and, following it, discovered the gag and other traces of Mountain Misery. This only caused more perplexity, and gave no clew, except that it was plain to all that Red-Eye had been with the party, for one of his feathers was found in the mine.

During the search some one asserted that the Indian had been in the habit of going to the hut of a hermit in the mountains, above the town, and Cache Carl at once proposed that they should go there. He was sure that Red-Eye was innocent, and wished to prove it.

Thus it was that Carl, with a half-dozen others, forthwith proceeded toward the retreat of Mountain Misery. And, it so happened, luckily for Ugalala, that the latter, after a short nap, had decided to search for Darington and Black, particularly the latter.

The Indian, therefore, stole from the hut, leaving his white pard outstretched upon a couch; the same clothing on him which Black had furnished Saunders and Brooks to put upon the recluse, when the latter was a captive in the old mine. This made him still more like his foe.

When Cache Carl and his party stole to the mountain cabin, as they eventually did, their astonishment may be but faintly imagined, when they found there, as they supposed, William Black himself! This identity was declared to our Chico friend, and it gave him evident satisfaction.

The sleeper was pounced upon, bound, and gagged, before he could speak; and, in that condition, hurried from the dark seam, and down the big rent in the range, to the town. When this was reached, the miners who preceded them, were found engaged in an attempt to bring the badly-bruised Saunders back to consciousness.

When they saw that the supposed Black had been captured, more than one among them produced a lariat, and noosing one end, clamored:

"Hang ther condemned cuss up a limb!"

"Jark him up! No time fer palaver."

"He's Black by name, an' black by natur'."

"Choke him ontill he tells whar Darin'ton air, an' ther boodle he bled him fer!"

Such were the outcries that filled Red-Eye Roost.

Cache Carl held up his hand for silence, and then said:

"Let's be reg'lar, boyees, an' gi'n him a try. Hit's a deep case. What ye're goin' ter hang

him fer? Yer don't know whether Darin'ton air dead er livin'—now does yer?"

"Brooks air dead, an' Saunders air dyin'!" yelled one.

"What o' thet?" returned Carl. "Does yer s'pose he'd kill his own pards? Dang sich a mixed up mess, I say!"

This had not struck the miners, and they were now greatly perplexed.

It certainly was a most mysterious case.

No one knew, at this time, the whereabouts of Dash Dare.

He had mysteriously disappeared.

The Indian, too, had been forgotten in the exultation occasioned by the capture of Black.

Poor Mountain Misery now felt miserable indeed. He was now securely bound, and surrounded by those who thirsted for his blood. All that he had feared, as likely to happen from his resemblance to William Black, had been brought about.

He hoped that Ugalala would not be captured, although the Indian might explain matters.

The story they had to relate, however, seemed even to himself an improbable one.

His case could not be benefited, even by Darington's being found alive; for the latter would certainly identify him as Black. Yet it did not appear that Darington was in possession of any evidence that would convict his fellow-traveler.

Death seemed to stare Mountain Misery in the face—an ignominious death!

Cache Carl was chosen, by acclamation, judge of the court.

The Chico giant knew that this was a mere matter of form, gone through with to please him; and that the crowd, when infuriated by the testimony which might be adduced, would be like raving maniacs.

But Carl had resolved to delay matters as much as was possible.

He found them very impatient, however. It had been a contrived plan, a premeditated murder, and a trial of the probable assassin, and his red confederate, according to the evidence of young Darington, might bring more facts to light.

Whisky, meanwhile, was passed around freely.

Cache Carl seated himself upon a table.

"Take ther gag outen his beef-trap," he ordered, "an' low him to tell his leetle story!"

Mountain Misery, thus relieved, sat, with his jaws stiff, his face pale as death.

"Gi'n him some bug-juice," suggested one.

"Hit'll be his last errigate on this hyer yearth, I reckon!"

This was favorably considered, and acted upon.

"Now, Mister Black," spoke Cache Carl, "ef yer hes anythin' ter spit out, as ter why yer shouldn't be strung up a limb, slide ahead!"

The recluse cleared his throat, casting a steady look into the eyes of each of the jury and then at the judge.

"Men of Pocketville," he said in a cold clear voice, "my name is not Black, and I never saw Saunders, Brooks, or Darington, until to-night."

Derisive laughter greeted this speech.

The prisoner continued:

"I see you have made up your minds to hang me, and will believe nothing I may say in my defense. I know William Black, and to my sorrow; for he robbed me, years ago, and left me for dead—yes, ruined me; and I have lived a solitary life in the mountains ever since!"

"My one hope in life has been to meet Black. We are as much alike in appearance as twins, and he has a brother who resembles us both."

"When Black and Darington arrived here yesterday, Ugalala, the Ute, whom you all call Red-Eye, and who is an honest Indian"—Cache Carl became deeply interested here—"saw Black, and came to inform me. I knew, from his description, he had found my man."

"The Indian, at my request, acted the spy on Black, and also on Saunders and Brooks, when the three met, and also when Darington formed the fourth of the party. There had been a plot, through which Black, Saunders, and Brooks, had enticed Darington to Pocketville, by offering him \$50,000 for his share in the Flush Hand Mine; but this was not to be done, unless he could be induced to have the same amount forwarded here by express, when, the \$100,000 was to be invested in Placertown mines."

"Black, being suspicious of the Indian, followed him to my hut, and was dumfounded when he recognized me. He then conceived another scheme, in connection with his latest discovery. He decided to capture me, place a

suit of his clothes on me, rob Darington, and cast us both into the ravine."

"Brooks and Saunders seized me. I allowing them to do so, in order to balk Black, and save Darington. They then bound and gagged me, dressing me as you see me."

"The Indian followed the miscreants, and cut me free. We kept ourselves informed of all their plans. Black was to be supposed to have perished, in my person, with his ill-fated partner. My work and Ugalala's was now easy, and we prepared for it."

"When Saunders and Brooks made their appearance, ahead of Black and Darington, my red friend and I knocked them senseless, and bound and gagged them. We then secured Saunders upon a horse, and put Brooks in my place in the thicket."

"When Darington rode along, in the dark, I jerked his horse into the cedars, the Indian leading the one upon which Saunders was bound, out, and along the shelf. Then he, too, secreted himself."

"Black galloped up alongside of Saunders, thinking it was Darington, and knocked him in the head. We had cut the girth, and man and saddle went over the steep. Then, with exultant yells, the assassin dismounted, ran to the thicket, and clutching Brooks, who he thought was myself, hurled him over!"

"Just then the moon broke from the clouds, and I stepped out from among the cedars. Black saw me—the man whom he believed he had just hurled to death—and fled in terror. Darington wandered away in fright also. This left Ugalala and myself in a very bad position, which I knew might result as it has; and I dared not come to town to reveal these facts, knowing I would not be believed."

"The Indian left me asleep. He is now, I imagine, searching for Darington and Black. The latter killed his own pards."

Saunders was now so much revived, that he seemed to realize what was going on.

The story told by Mountain Misery had been plain and straightforward, yet sneers and laughs of derision were to be heard all around the room. It was absurd, in the judgment of all.

Saunders now spoke.

"That is Black himself," said the dying man feebly. "He got me an' Brooks into the Flush Hand. Darington's money run it. He wanted ter git shed o' him, an' me an' Brooks too, it 'pears. So he got other men to lay fer us, an' throw us over the rocks."

"Hang him, for he deserves it, an' I won't kick if you hang me too!"

All was still as death, and soon it was death indeed. Saunders spoke not again.

The cry that followed, was the cry of madmen for blood.

Cache Carl made no move to guard the captive. He knew not what to think.

The man must be Black.

The surging mob dragged poor Mountain Misery out from Red-Eye Roost.

Carl followed them.

He gazed anxiously up the range.

Could it be possible that they were about to hang an innocent man?

The deadly noose was cast over the head of the hermit, the slack over a limb.

The Chico giant drew near.

"Jark ther cuss up!"

This yell came from many.

The next instant, upward went the body of Bentley Bowen, swaying above the heads of the mad crowd!

Then was heard, from the foot of the range, a terrific war-whoop, and Cache Carl saw Ugalala leading a bound man by a rope around the captive's neck.

Three shots, one after the other, came in quick succession from the revolver of Carl, and the form of Mountain Misery fell to the earth. The young giant then folded his arms, and cried out:

"Pards o' Pocketville, wait a minut' ontill Red-Eye 'roves. He's comin', an' with ther right man ter string up, er I'll chaw my own ears off!"

When the Indian—for it was in reality Ugalala, who had found and captured Bill Black—realized the scene ahead, he clutched his prisoner by the belt, and lifting him bodily, shouldered Black, and ran at full speed toward the crowd; but perceiving Cache Carl, he sprang toward the latter, throwing his captive at the giant's feet.

Extending both his hands, the red-man exclaimed, with every sign of pleasure in his face and eyes:

"How, how, how-dy, Cache Carl!"

One look at the face of the man who was lying

at his feet was enough for the Chico giant. He wrung both hands of Ugalala, gave a far-reaching whoop, and then turning to the dumfounded crowd, who had just been about to shoot for interrupting their "lynch picnic," at the same time spurning the body of Bill Black, he said, simply:

"Don't be impatient, pards o' Pocketville; hyer's yer meat fer ter hang up ter dry."

A ringing cheer burst from all, some hastily striving to revive Mountain Misery, the rest rushing to gaze at the real ruffian.

A piercing whistle then sounded from up the range, and as the crowd gazed they flung up their hats with joy and relief, while the air was filled with welcoming yells.

They saw, in the moonlight, two men standing upon a huge, bare rock.

One was easily recognized.

It was Dash Dare.

The other, they knew, must be the missing man, David Darington.

"Dash Dare o' Denver hev found his dad!" sung out some one.

"Whoop-er-ee-e! Ker-whoop!"

This from Cache Carl.

CHAPTER XVI.

WRONGS RIGHTED.

CACHE CARL and Ugalala strode toward the range, the giant yelling to Dash Dare, and gesticulating wildly.

The crowd gathered around Bill Black, whose clothing was torn, his hands and face scratched and bruised; but his snaky eyes shot glances of hatred and disdain at the miners. He was like a wild beast at bay, and had he not been bound fast, would undoubtedly have rushed upon the crowd, and fought to the death. This, the men realized at once, and they felt great relief at the thought that they had been prevented from hanging an innocent man.

Convulsed as he was with baffled rage, for he knew the man he hated, and who had been taken for himself, had been cut down from death by the bullets of the Chico giant, and a realization that he was undoubtedly doomed, he looked or appeared far different from Mountain Misery; but, under less rage and excitement it was plain the resemblance would be very striking.

No doubts remained in the minds of the crowd as to the real Bill Black being before them.

Bentley Bowen was brought back to life, and led by the rough men up to the side of the man who had so wronged him in the past, and who had, that night, so nearly brought him to an ignominious death. Black writhed like a serpent, striving to squirm over the sword toward him; gnashing his teeth, and cursing terribly.

Then it was that the marked contrast in the character of the two men, so much alike in appearance, was strongly manifest.

"Wretch!" exclaimed the hermit; "you thought you had slain me, when you robbed me of all that I possessed, near Santa Fe, and left me for the coyotes and buzzards—this, too, while pretending to be my friend; just as, last night, you had plotted to rob and murder David Darington, the trusting and innocent dupe you last angled for."

"Your very breath poisons the air. You are too vile to live—too wicked to die!"

"But he's got ter, an' ornighly soon," put in a miner; "an' yeou, Mountain Misery, air ther one what orter tie ther rope 'round his cussed gullet!"

"I long ago vowed to be avenged, but I had become hopeless of ever accomplishing it. The Fates have been propitious at last. I'll tie the noose, and then trace his villainous brother, who assisted in my ruin!"

The wretch grew fairly black in the face with fury, but his tongue refused to articulate, his rage was so extreme and unnatural.

"Let's h'ist him, pards!"

"Wait a bit ontill Cache Carl comes. He's a brick—a pressed brick et that!"

"Hurrah fer Cache Carl o' Chico!"

"Hurrah fer Red-Eye!"

"Hurrah fer ther Daisy from Denver!"

Such were the outcries of the crowd, for those mentioned were all within view, and Darington as well.

A round of cheers awaited their near approach, and Crystal Charley rushed to join the crowd and see the fun; although, as was proved later on, he had a more important object.

"Thar's ther condemned skunk!" exclaimed Cache Carl, as he pointed to the form of Bill Black. "Air he yer pardner, Mister Darington?"

"Yes, that is William Black, whom I trusted as a friend. I've seen the letter, found by my

son in Denver, from Saunders and Brooks to John Black, and I know from that that the brothers, as well as their agents here, and who I am told are both dead, were all double-dyed villains."

"Who is that, then?" questioned the giant, as he pointed to Mountain Misery.

"Great heavens!" was the exclamation of Darington, while Dash gazed in amazement.

"Now I understand it all," said the youth, at length. "Gentlemen, I did not tell you everything that I saw from the foot-hills, for I felt that you would not credit it. I saw two men, each of whom I believed to be Bill Black. One rode away, the other stood by the cedars. It was more than marvelous."

"My name is Bentley Bowen," said the recluse, "although it is years since I have been thus known. I am rather appropriately called Mountain Misery, from my having lived for a long time a miserable life in the mountains."

"But to Ugalala you owe everything, Mr. Darington. It was only through him that I have been able to accomplish what I have. He is a white man, if his skin is red, and whisky at times, unhappily, rules him."

Not until Cache Carl had explained to the crowd that every word of Bowen's had been confirmed by Darington, did the miners fully comprehend the perfidy and murderous nature of the villain, Bill Black.

They then rushed frantically, to drag him to the tree, but Carl yelled:

"Hold on, pard! Low me ter spoke a few words o' advice. Jist call ter mind that I tried ter hold yer back, ontill Dash, an' his dad, an' Red-Eye war foun', but yer w'u'dn't listen ter me. As hit war, yer come ormighty nigh stringin' up a innercent pilgrim, what war gunnin' fer ther same galoot yer thought he war hisself. Hit orter be a warnin' 'gainst goin' et stomped speed in sich sort o' biz."

"But, ter make yer dead sure ye're goin' ter do the yearth good by hangin' this cuss hyer, I'll jist say that I war in Pocketville, 'spressly fer ter spot, an' ter watch Saunders an' Brooks; an' I knowed they war meanderin' under false cog's. I war more anxious yit, 'bout that skunk down thar, fer he war cap'n of a road-agent outfit down-range, 'fore he skuted Denver-way, an' Brooks an' Saunders war in his gang."

"Thar's bin good work done ter-night, pards, an' hit's all bin fotched 'roun' O. K. by my red pard, as yer calls Red-Eye; but I axed yer ter drap the cog. He's a Ute chief, an' he's won ther right ter war his Injun handle, which air Ugalala."

Three cheers were given for the Indian, who waved his hand grandly, in acknowledgment.

It seemed as though Cache Carl delayed the execution of Black purposely, to torture the miscreant.

He was now a pitiable object, hardly human. Carl waved his hand to the crowd, and pointed to the tree and the victim.

With a wild yell, the wretch was seized, and dragged beneath the limb.

David Darington clutched the hand of his son, and begged Dare to return to the hotel with him. He had seen horrors enough for one night, and did not wish to look upon the revolting sight. Dash walked away with his father.

Mountain Misery, when called upon by the crowd, stepped up and tied the fatal noose, adjusting the same about the neck of the man who had so nearly been the means of his death, on two occasions, and had made him a beggar.

It was soon over. Justice was satisfied.

The slack of the rope was secured to the trunk of the tree, and the crowd proceeded toward Red-Eye Roost. But they discovered that Darington and his son, with Crystal Charley, were waiting near the front of the hotel.

Carl, Ugalala, and Bowen soon reached them, and the miners gathered around.

Charley held up his hand, to claim attention. "Pards of Pocketville," he began, "we are proud of our town, and claim to be square and white. You bet! This night you have all turned out to break up crookedness, and save one who had come here a stranger, from being robbed and murdered." ("Wa-al, I reckon!")

"I was forced to remain at home, but I leave it to you if I have not done my share when I explain. You do not know that Mr. Darington has lost \$50,000 in an express package, but such is the case."

"He does not care to speak of it, or the twenty-five thousand he put into the Flush Hand, for he is thankful for his life. The money paid him, counterfeit at that, was lost, but has been found by young Darington. However, that is no good."

"Now, I am nothing but a New York Bowery boy, but I claim to be a man. I am only a bar-keeper, forced into the business by circumstances; but, although a crystal-slinger, I pride myself on being honorable. I might make myself a rich man, by a single dishonest act to-night, but I am not that kind."

"Mr. Darington is under the impression that he lost his package in the mountains, but I have to tell him that he left it under his mattress—placed it there in his excitement, caused by the racket we made, and the stories told him by Black. Let me now return your \$50,000, Mr. Darington. It is as safe in this crowd as it would be in the Equitable vaults on Broadway!"

Such a roar of whoops and yells rung out at the close of Charley's speech, as would have put to shame a savage war-party.

"Better sock thet inter yer boot," said a miner, referring to the package. "Yer must be jist p'isoned w' money. Why doesn't yer purchase Colorado, an' gi'n a pilgrim o' my size a slice?"

The boys had started in early, to make a night of it, but they had no thought of what was coming to interfere with their enjoyment. They now endeavored to make up for lost time.

They first desired to have a word with Dick, the hostler, who, Cache Carl asserted knew something of Black's antecedents; but that worthy had been so frightened at the hanging of the man he had once confederated with, that he levanted before the crowd returned.

The corpse in the chamber was forgotten, but Ugalala secured his hat and blanket, and after a few drinks was himself again.

Mountain Misery drank nothing, and was invited to the apartment of Darington, where Dash and Carl soon joined them. It seemed that the Indian had followed the trail of Black, who had gone up a great gulch, left his horse, and lay down to sleep, utterly prostrated. The red-man threw himself upon the assassin, bound him, and brought him back to the town, just in time to save the life of Bentley Bowen.

Dashiell Darington had wandered aimlessly in his search, not knowing where to go, but the kind fates were guiding him, and eventually he discovered his father in a cleft of the rocks, where he had fallen to sleep, but had been awakened by his son's voice.

When those most prominent in our narrative, with the exception of the Ute, met in the chamber of Darington, all held consultation; and both Dash and his father expressed their apprehensions in regard to the safety of Della and her uncle.

Knowing the character of John Black so well, it was little wonder that they decided upon as early a start for Denver as possible.

Cache Carl and Bowen determined to accompany them, and arrest John Black for crimes in the past known to both of them, when he and his brother traveled under another alias.

Crystal Charley and Ugalala were rewarded liberally, and their friends set out as proposed.

They had been brought together in a strange manner, through startling occurrences, and their future, it seemed probable, would be somewhat bound up together.

Dash Dare had proved himself well named, and Cache Carl sustained his reputation, as the most daring Detective of the Divide.

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